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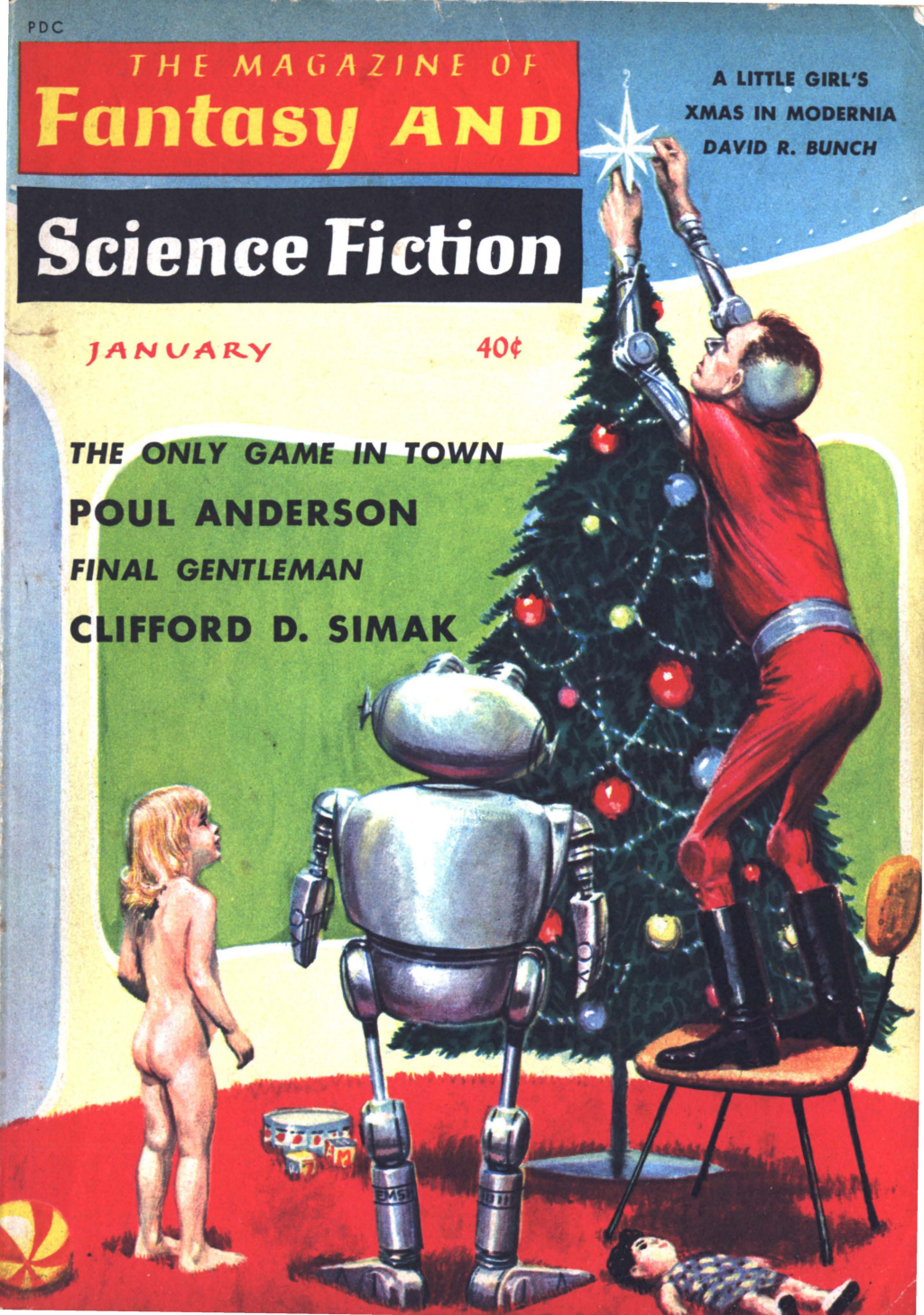
THE ONLY GAME IN TOWN

POUL ANDERSON

FINAL GENTLEMAN

CLIFFORD D. SIMAK

A LITTLE GIRL'S  
XMAS IN MODERNIA  
DAVID R. BUNCH



# Fantasy and Science Fiction

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## ***In this issue . . .***

In connection with Poul Anderson's new Time Patrol novelet, leading off this issue, we were intrigued to note on the front page of a recent New York *Herald Tribune* a news report headlined: "Chinese First in America?" The story was datelined Taipei, and stated that one Tai Chien-san, a Nationalist Chinese historian had published an article claiming that a Chinese monk named Fa Hsien had landed in Mexico in 412 A. D., thus discovering America more than 1,000 years before Christopher Columbus. Since Mr. Anderson's story was written long before this report, we feel that science fiction can now claim not only accurate foresight—as exemplified most famously by Cleve Cartmill's FBI-distressing atom-bomb story—but also superb hindsight. Our warmest congratulations to Mr. Anderson!

"The Blind Pilot," by Charles Henneberg (see page 37) originally appeared in F&SF's French edition, which is most ably edited by Maurice Renault. The larger part of M. Renault's publication consists of stories from the U. S. version; wisely, though, in each issue he substitutes a few stories written by Frenchmen for those stories in our edition which might have less appeal for a French audience. Regrettably, "The Blind Pilot" is a posthumous story—in a sense; M. Henneberg died before the story was published in France, but we understand that the name Charles Henneberg was used as a signature for the collaborative efforts of M. Henneberg and his wife, Nathalie. . . . We are most grateful to Damon Knight for having called this story to our domestic attention, and are hopeful that there will be other "Charles Hennebergs" coming up in the future.

Speaking of being grateful—we'd like to express our thanks to Dorothy Cowles Pinckney for having sent us a copy of the "little" magazine *Coastlines* containing the David R. Bunch story reprinted herein (see page 102).

## ***Coming next month . . .***

Ward Moore—if you have been with us long, you will not have forgotten "Bring the Jubilee," or "Lot," or other fine examples of his work—comes back with a novelet: "The Fellow Who Married the Maxill Girl" . . . an occasion for rejoicing. There will also be a fine new novelet by Howard Fast, and a variety of other fine stories.

*Concerning the astonishing fact that the Chinese discovered America more than 200 years before Columbus did, and the unusual adventures of two Time Patrol Operatives assigned to protect the future from the invasion of Mongols.*

## THE ONLY GAME IN TOWN

*by Poul Anderson*

JOHN SANDOVAL DID NOT BELONG to his name. Nor did it seem right that he should stand in slacks and aloha shirt before an apartment window opening on mid-Twentieth Century Manhattan. Everard was used to anachronism, but the dark hooked face confronting him always seemed to want warpaint, a horse, and a gun sighted on some pale thief.

"Okay," he said. "The Chinese discovered America. Interesting, but why does the fact need my services?"

"I wish to hell I knew," Sandoval answered.

His rangy form turned about on the polar-bear rug, which Bjarni Herjulfsson had once given to Everard, until he stared outward. Towers were sharp against a clear sky; the noise of traffic was muted by height. His hands clasped and unclasped behind his back.

"I was ordered to co-opt an Unattached agent, go back with him

and take whatever measures seemed indicated," he went on after a while. "I knew you best, so—" His voice trailed off.

"But shouldn't you get an Indian like yourself?" asked Everard. "I'd seem rather out of place in Thirteenth Century America."

"So much the better. Make it impressive, mysterious. . . . It won't be too tough a job, really."

"Of course not," said Everard. "Whatever the job actually is."

He took pipe and tobacco pouch from his disreputable smoking jacket and stuffed the bowl in quick, nervous jabs. One of the hardest lessons he had had to learn, when first recruited into the Time Patrol, was that every important task does not require the vast organization that was characteristic of the Twentieth Century approach. Earlier cultures, like Athenian Hellas and Kamakura Japan—and later civilizations too, here and there in history—had concentrated on the de-



velopment of individual excellence. A single graduate of the Patrol Academy (equipped, to be sure, with tools and weapons of the future) could be the equivalent of a brigade.

But it was a matter of necessity as well as esthetics. There were all too few people to watch over all too many thousands of years.

"I get the impression," said Everard slowly, "that this is not a simple rectification of extratemporal interference."

"Right," said Sandoval in a harsh voice. "When I reported what I'd found, the Yuan milieu office made a thorough investigation. No time travelers are involved. Kubilai Khan thought this up entirely by himself. He may have been inspired by Marco Polo's accounts of Venetian and Arab sea voyages, but it was legitimate history, even if Marco's book doesn't mention anything of the sort."

"The Chinese had quite a nautical tradition of their own," said Everard. "Oh, it's all very natural. So how do we come in?"

Over the years his soul had grown as burly as his body. Nonetheless, he shivered a little. The idea he was brushing past always frightened him. When mortal and fallible man became able to travel in time, up in 19352 A.D., he also became able to change history. Not easily: the pattern of events has a strong tendency to self-correction; but crucial points do exist. (Go

back to 1642, sneeze at a skinny infant named Isaac Newton, give him just the virus to break his frail hold on life; physics will still evolve, but more slowly, dominated for better or worse by the relativistic insights of Leibniz and the wave mechanical views of Huygens. In three hundred years, the world will hardly be recognizable. Your own parents will never have been born. You will be there in the past, without progenitors, remembering future events which — now! — never occurred. The notion violates all science and logic of every civilization prior to the strange one which built the first time engine.)

The Patrol, assembled from every age, its ultimate masters dwelling some million years hence, existed to guard, guide, and assist the time traffic. But chiefly it existed to preserve the history which was.

Everard got his pipe lit and drew hard on it. Sandoval still hadn't spoken, so he asked, "How did you happen to find this expedition? It wasn't in Navajo country, was it?"

"Hell, I'm not confined to studying my own tribe," Sandoval answered. "Too few Amerinds in the Patrol as is, and it's a nuisance disguising other breeds. I've been working on Athabascan migrations generally." Unlike Everard, who was unattached—in effect, a policeman with a roving commission—Sandoval was an ethnic Special-

ist, tracing the history of peoples who never wrote their own so that the Patrol could know exactly what the events were that it safeguarded.

"I was working along the eastern slope of the Cascades, near Crater Lake," he went on. "That's Lutuami country, but I had reason to believe an Athabascan tribe I'd lost track of had passed that way. The natives spoke of mysterious strangers coming from the north. I went to have a look, and there the expedition was, Mongols with horses. I checked their back-trail and found their camp at the mouth of the Columbia River, where a few more Mongols were helping the Chinese sailors guard the ships. I hopped back upstairs like a bat out of Los Angeles and reported."

Everard sat down and stared at the other man. "How thorough an investigation did get made at the Chinese end?" he said. "Are you absolutely certain there was no extra-temporal interference? It could be one of those unplanned blunders, you know, whose consequences aren't obvious for decades."

"I thought of that too, when I got my assignment," Sandoval nodded. "I even went directly to Yuan milieu HQ in Khan Baligh—Cambaluc or Peking to you. They told me they'd checked it clear back to Genghis' lifetime, and spatially as far as Indonesia. And it was all perfectly okay, like the Norse and their Vinland. It simply didn't hap-

pen to have gotten the same publicity. As far as the Chinese court knew, an expedition had been sent out and had never returned, and Kubilai decided it wasn't worthwhile to send another. The record of it lay in the Imperial archives, but was destroyed during the Ming revolt which expelled the Mongols. Historiography forgot the incident."

Still Everard brooded. He was a big man, with a battered face, gray eyes, stiff brown hair; normally he liked his work, but there was something abnormal about this occasion.

"Obviously," he said, "the expedition met a disaster. We'd like to know what. But why do you need an Unattached agent to spy on them?"

Sandoval turned from the window. It crossed Everard's mind again, fleetingly, how little the Navajo belonged here. He was born in 1930, had fought in Korea and gone through college on G.I. before the Patrol contacted him, but somehow, he never quite fitted the Twentieth Century.

*Well, do any of us? Could any man with real roots stand knowing what will eventually happen to his own people?*

"But I'm not supposed to spy!" Sandoval exclaimed. "When I'd reported, my orders came straight back from Daneelian headquarters. No explanation, no excuses — the naked command: arrange that disaster. Revise history myself!"

Anno Domini One Thousand Two Hundred Eighty:

The writ of Kubilai Khan ran over degrees of latitude and longitude; he dreamed of world empire, and his court honored any guest who brought fresh knowledge or new philosophy. A young Venetian merchant named Marco Polo had become a particular favorite. But not all peoples desired a Mongol overlord. Revolutionary secret societies germinated throughout those several conquered realms lumped together as Cathay. Japan, with the Hojo family an able power behind the throne, had already repelled one invasion. Nor were the Mongols unified, save in theory. The Russian princes had become tax collectors for the Golden Horde; the Il-Khan Abaka sat in Baghdad.

Elsewhere, a shadowy Abbasid Caliphate had refuge in Cairo; Delhi was under the Slave Dynasty; Nicholas III was Pope; Guelphs and Ghibbelines were ripping up Italy; Rudolf of Hapsburg was German Emperor, Philip the Bold was King of France, Edward Longshanks ruled England. Contemporaries included Dante Alighieri, Joannes Duns Scotus, Roger Bacon, and Thomas the Rhymer.

And in North America, Manse Everard and John Sandoval reined their horses to stare down a long hill.

"The date I first saw them is last week," said the Navajo. "They've come quite a ways since. At this

rate, they'll be in Mexico in a couple of months, even allowing for some rugged country ahead."

"By Mongol standards," Everard told him, "they're proceeding leisurely."

He raised his binoculars. Around him, the land burned green with April. Even the highest and oldest beeches fluttered gay young leaves. Pines roared in the wind, which blew down off the mountains cold and swift and smelling of melted snow, through a sky where birds were homebound in such flocks that they could darken the sun. The peaks of the Cascade range seemed to float in the west, blue-white, distant, and holy. Eastward the foothills tumbled in clumps of forest and meadow to a valley and so at last, beyond the horizon, to prairies thunderous under buffalo herds.

Everard focused on the expedition. It wound through the open areas, more or less following a small river. Some seventy men rode shaggy, dun-colored, short-legged, long-headed Asian horses. They led pack animals and remounts. He identified a few native guides, as much by their awkward seat in the saddle as by their physiognomy and clothing. But the newcomers held his attention most.

"A lot of pregnant mares toting packs," he remarked, half to himself. "I suppose they took as many horses in the ships as they could, letting them out to exercise and

graze wherever they made a stop. Now they're breeding more as they go along. That kind of pony is tough enough to survive such treatment."

"The detachment at the ships is also raising horses," Sandoval informed him. "I saw that much."

"What else do you know about this bunch?"

"No more than I've told you, which is little more than you've now seen. And that record which lay for a while in Kubilai's archives. But you recall, it barely notes that four ships under the command of the Noyon Toktai and the scholar Li Tai-Tsung were dispatched to explore the islands beyond Japan."

Everard nodded absently. No sense in sitting here and rehashing what they'd already gone over a hundred times. It was only a way of postponing action.

Sandoval cleared his throat. "I'm still dubious about both of us going down there," he said. "Why don't you stay in reserve, in case they get nasty?"

"Hero complex, huh?" said Everard. "No, we're better off together. I don't expect trouble anyhow. Not yet. Those boys are much too intelligent to antagonize anyone gratuitously. They've stayed on good terms with the Indians, haven't they? And we'll be a far more unknown quantity. . . . I wouldn't mind a drink beforehand, though."

"Yeh. And afterward, too!"

Each dipped in his saddlebag,

took out a half-gallon canteen, and hoisted it. The Scotch was pungent in Everard's throat, heartening in his veins. He clucked to his horse and both Patrolmen rode down the slope.

A whistling cut the air. They had been seen. He maintained a steady pace toward the head of the Mongol line. A pair of outriders closed in on either flank, arrows nocked to their short powerful bows, but did not interfere.

*I suppose we look harmless,* Everard thought. Like Sandoval, he wore Twentieth Century outdoor clothes, hunting jacket to break the wind, hat to keep off the rain. His own outfit was a good deal less elegant than the Navajo's Abercrombie & Fitch special. They both bore daggers for show, Mauser machine pistols and Thirtieth Century stun-beam projectors for business.

The troop reined in, so disciplined that it was almost like one man halting. Everard scanned them closely as he neared. He had gotten a pretty complete electronic education in an hour or so before departure—language, history, technology, manners, morals, of Mongols and Chinese and even the local Indians. But he had never before seen these people close up.

They weren't spectacular: stocky, bowlegged, with thin beards and flat broad faces that

shone greased in the sunlight. They were all well-equipped, wearing boots and trousers, laminated leather cuirasses with lacquer ornamentation, conical steel helmets that might have a spike or plume on top. Their weapons were curved sword, knife, lance, compound bow. One man near the head of the line bore a standard of gold-braided yak tails. They watched the Patrolmen approach, their narrow dark eyes impassive.

The chief was readily identified. He rode in the van, and a tattered silken cloak blew from his shoulders. He was rather larger and even more hard-faced than his average trooper, with a reddish beard and almost Roman nose. The Indian guide beside him gaped and huddled back; but Toktai Noyon held his place, measuring Everard with a steady carnivore look.

"Greeting," he called when the newcomers were in earshot. "What spirit brings you?" He spoke the Lutuami dialect which was later to become the Klamath language, with an atrocious accent.

Everard replied in flawless, barking Mongolian: "Greeting to you, Toktai son of Batu. The Tengri willing, we come in peace."

It was an effective touch. Everard glimpsed Mongols reaching for lucky charms or making signs against the evil eye. But the man mounted at Toktai's left was quick to recover a schooled self-

possession. "Ah," he said, "so men of the Western lands have also reached this country."

Everard looked at him. He was taller than any Mongol, his skin almost white, his features and hands delicate. Though dressed much like the others, he was unarmed. He seemed older than the Noyon, perhaps fifty. Everard bowed in the saddle and switched to North Chinese: "Honored Li Tai-Tsung, it grieves this insignificant person to contradict your eminence, but we belong to the great realm further south."

"We have heard rumors," said the scholar. He couldn't quite suppress excitement. "Even this far north, tales have been borne of a rich and splendid country. We are seeking it that we may bring your Khan the greeting of the Kha Khan, Kubilai son of Tuli, son of Genghis; the earth lies at his feet."

"We know of the Kha Khan," said Everard, "as we know of the Caliph, the Pope, the Emperor, and all lesser monarchs." He had to pick his way with care, not openly insulting Cathay's ruler but still, subtly putting him in his place. "Little is known in return of us, for our master does not seek the outside world, nor encourage it to seek him. Permit me to introduce my unworthy self. I am called Everard and am not, as my appearance would suggest, a Russian or Westerner. I belong to the border guardians."



Let them figure out what that meant.

"You didn't come with much company," snapped Toktai.

"More was not required," said Everard in his smoothest voice.

"And you are far from home," put in Li.

"No farther than you would be, honorable sirs, in the Kirghiz marches."

Toktai clapped a hand to his sword hilt. His eyes were chill and wary. "Come," he said. "Be welcome as ambassadors, then. Let's make camp and hear the word of your king."

Low above western peaks, the sun turned their snowcaps tarnished silver. Shadows lengthened down in the valley, the forest darkened, but the open meadow seemed to glow all the brighter. The underlying quiet made almost a sounding board for such noises as existed: rapid swirl and cluck of the river, ring of an ax, horses cropping in long grass. Wood-smoke tinged the air.

The Mongols were obviously taken aback at their visitors and this early halt. They kept wooden faces, but their eyes would stray to Everard and Sandoval and they would mutter formulas of their various religions—chiefly pagan, but some Buddhist, Moslem, or Nestorian prayers. It did not impair the efficiency with which they set up camp, posted guard, cared

for the animals, prepared to cook supper. But Everard judged they were more quiet than usual. The patterns impressed on his brain by the educator told him Mongols were talkative and cheerful, as a rule.

He sat cross-legged on a tent floor. Sandoval, Toktai, and Li completed the circle. Rugs lay under them, and a brazier kept hot a pot of tea. It was the only tent pitched, probably the only one available, taken along for use on ceremonial occasions like this. Toktai poured *kumiss* with his own hands and offered it to Everard, who slurped as loudly as etiquette demanded and passed it on. He had drunk worse things than fermented mare's milk, but was glad that everyone switched to tea after the ritual.

The Mongol chief spoke. He couldn't keep his tone smooth, as his Chinese amanuensis did. There was an instinctive bristling: what foreigner dares approach the Kha Khan's man, save on his belly? But the words remained courteous: "Now let our guests declare the business of their king. First, would you name him?"

"His name may not be spoken," said Everard. "Of his realm you have heard only the palest rumors. You may judge his power, Noyon, by the fact that he needed only us two to come this far, and that we needed only one mount apiece."

Toktai grunted. "Those are handsome animals you ride, though I wonder how well they'd do on the steppe. Did it take you long to get here?"

"No more than a day, Noyon. We have means."

Everard reached in his jacket and brought out a couple of small gift-wrapped parcels. "Our lord bade us present the Cathayan leaders these tokens of regard."

While the paper was being removed, Sandoval leaned over and hissed in English: "Dig their expressions, Manse. We goofed a bit."

"How?"

"That flashy cellophane and stuff impresses a barbarian like Toktai. But notice Li. His civilization was doing calligraphy when the ancestors of Bonwit Teller were painting themselves blue. His opinion of our taste has just nosedived."

Everard shrugged imperceptibly. "Well, he's right, isn't he?"

Their colloquy had not escaped the others. Toktai gave them a hard stare, but returned to his present, a flashlight, which had to be demonstrated and exclaimed over. He was a little afraid of it at first, even mumbled a charm; then he remembered that a Mongol wasn't allowed to be afraid of anything except thunder, mastered himself, and was soon delighted as a child. The best bet for a Confucian scholar like Li

seemed a book, the *Family of Man* collection, whose diversity and pictorial technique might impress him. He was effusive in his thanks, but Everard doubted if he was overwhelmed. A Patrolman soon learned that sophistication exists at any level of technology.

Gifts must be made in return, a fine Chinese sword and a bundle of sea otter pelts from the coast. It was quite some time before the conversation could turn back to business. Then Sandoval managed to get the other party's account first.

"Since you know so much," Toktai began, "you must also know that our invasion of Japan failed several years ago."

"The will of heaven was otherwise," said Li with courtier blandness.

"Horse apples!" growled Toktai. "The stupidity of men was otherwise, you mean. We were too few, too ignorant, and we'd come too far in seas too rough. And what of it? We'll return there one day."

Everard knew rather sadly that they would, and that a storm would destroy the fleet and drown who knows how many young men. But he let Toktai continue:

"The Kha Khan realized we must learn more about the islands. Perhaps we should try to establish a base somewhere north of Hokkaido. Then, too, we have long heard rumors about lands further

west. Fishermen are blown off course now and then, and have glimpses; traders from Siberia have spoken of a strait and a country beyond. The Kha Khan got four ships with Chinese crews and told me to take a hundred Mongol warriors and see what I could discover."

Everard nodded, unsurprised. The Chinese had been sailing junks for hundreds of years: seaworthy, maneuverable craft, some holding up to a thousand passengers. They must have a little familiarity with the Kuriles, at least, even if the cold northern waters had never attracted them much.

"We followed two chains of islands, one after another," said Toktai. "They were bleak enough, but we could stop here and there, to let the horses out, learn something from the natives. Though the Tengri know it's hard to do that last, when you may have to interpret through six languages! Finally we came to the mainland, a big country, forests, much game and seals. Too rainy, though. Our ships seemed to want to continue, so we followed the coast, more or less."

Everard visualized a map. If you go first along the Kuriles and then the Aleutians, you are never far from land. The junks, being centerboard craft, could find anchorage even at those rocky islands; and in summer the weather isn't hopelessly bad. Also, the

Japan Current urges you along, and you are very nearly on a great circle course. Toktai had discovered Alaska before he quite knew what had happened. Since the country grew ever more hospitable as he coasted south, he proceeded clear to the Columbia River.

"We set up camp when the year was waning," said the Mongol. "The tribes thereabouts are backward and timid, but friendly. They gave us all the food, women, and help we could ask for. In return, our Chinese sailors taught them some tricks of fishing and boat-building. We wintered there, learned some of the languages, made trips inland on horseback. Everywhere were tales of huge forests and plains where herds of wild cattle blacken the earth. We saw enough to know the stories were true. I've never been in so rich a land." His eyes gleamed tigerishly. "And so few dwellers, who don't even know the use of iron."

"Noyon," murmured Li warningly. He nodded his head very slightly toward the Patrolmen. Toktai clamped his mouth shut.

Li turned to Everard and said, "There were also rumors of a golden realm far to the south. We felt it our duty to investigate this, as well as explore the country in between. We had not looked for the honor of being met by your eminent selves."

"The honor is all ours," Everard

purred. Then, putting on his gravest face: "My lord of the Golden Empire, who may not be named, has sent us in a spirit of friendship. It would grieve him to see you meet disaster. We come to warn you."

"What?" Toktai sat up straight. One sinewy hand snatched for the sword which, politely, he wasn't wearing. "What in the hells is this?"

"In the hells indeed, Noyon. Pleasant though this country seem, it lies under a curse. Tell him, my brother."

Sandoval, who had a better speaking voice, took over. His yarn had been concocted with an eye to exploiting that superstition which still lingered in the half-civilized Mongols, without generating too much Chinese skepticism. There were really two great southern kingdoms, he explained. Their own lay far away; its rival was somewhat north and east of it, with a citadel on the plains. Both states possessed immense powers, call them sorcery or subtle engineering as you wished. The northerly empire, Badguys, considered all this territory as its own and would not tolerate a foreign expedition. Its scouts were certain to discover the Mongols before long, and would annihilate them with thunderbolts. The benevolent southern land of Goodguys would offer no protection, could only send emissaries warning the

Mongols to turn home again.

"Why have the natives not spoken of these overlords?" asked Li shrewdly.

"Has every little tribesman in the jungles of Burma heard about the Kha Khan?" responded Sandoval.

"I am a stranger and ignorant," said Li. "Forgive me if I do not understand your talk of irresistible weapons."

*Which is the politest way I've ever been called a liar*, thought Everard. Aloud: "I can offer a small demonstration, if the Noyon has an animal that may be killed."

Toktai considered. His visage might have been scarred stone, but sweat filmed it. He clapped his hands and barked orders to the guard who looked in. Thereafter they made small talk in a silence that thickened.

A warrior appeared after some endless part of an hour. He said that a couple of horsemen had lassoed a deer. Would it serve the Noyon's purpose? It would. Toktai led the way out, shouldering through a thick and buzzing swarm of men. Everard followed, wishing this weren't needful. He slipped the rifle stock onto his Mauser. "Care to do the job?" he asked Sandoval.

"Christ, no."

The deer, a doe, had been forced back to camp. She trembled by the river, the horsehair ropes about her neck. The sun, just

touching the western peaks, turned her to bronze. There was a blind sort of gentleness in her look at Everard. He waved back the men around her and took aim. The first slug killed her, but he kept the gun chattering till her carcass was gruesome.

When he lowered his weapon, the air felt somehow rigid. He looked across all the thick bandy-legged bodies, the flat grimly controlled faces; he could smell them with unnatural sharpness, a clean odor of sweat and horses and smoke. He felt himself as non-human as they must see him.

"That is the least of the arms used here," he said. "A soul so torn from the body would not find its way home."

He turned on his heel. Sandoval followed him. Their horses had been staked out, the gear piled close by. They saddled, unspeaking, mounted and rode off into the forest.

The fire blazed up in a gust of wind. Sparingly laid by a woodsman, in that moment it barely brought the two out of shadow, a glimpse of brow, nose, cheekbones, a gleam of eyes. It sank down again to red and blue sputtering above white coals, and darkness took the men.

Everard wasn't sorry. He fumbled his pipe in his hands, bit hard on it and drank smoke, but found little comfort. When he

spoke, the vast soughing of trees, high up in the night, almost buried his voice, and he did not regret that either.

Nearby were their sleeping bags, their horses, the scooter—antigravity sled cum space-time hopper—which had brought them. Otherwise the land was empty, mile upon mile, human fires like their own as small and lonely as stars in the universe. Somewhere a wolf howled.

"I suppose," Everard said, "every cop feels like a bastard occasionally. You've just been an observer so far, Jack. Active assignments, such as I get, are often hard to accept."

"Yeh." Sandoval had been even more quiet than his friend. He had scarcely stirred since supper.

"And now this. Whatever you have to do, to cancel a temporal interference, you can at least think you're restoring the original line of development." Everard fumed on his pipe. "Don't remind me that 'original' is meaningless in this context. It's a consoling word."

"Uh-huh."

"But when our bosses, our dear Daneelian supermen, tell us to interfere— We know Toktai's people never came back to Cathay. Why should you and I have to take a hand? If they ran into hostile Indians or something and were wiped out, I wouldn't mind. At least, no more than I mind any



similar incident in that God damned slaughterhouse they call human history."

"We don't have to kill them, you know. Just make them turn back. Your demonstration this afternoon may be enough."

"Yeah. Turn back . . . and what? Probably perish at sea. They won't have an easy trip home, storm, fog, currents, rocks. And we'll have set them on that trip at precisely that time! If we didn't interfere, they'd start home later, the circumstances of the voyage would be different. . . . Why should we take the guilt?"

"They could even make it home," murmured Sandoval.

"What?" Everard started.

"Obviously they have good crews and shipmasters. I think their chances would be excellent. Especially if they head straight across the ocean, via Hawaii, Micronesia, and the Philippines—and I imagine the Chinese are geographically sophisticated enough to contemplate that. Manse, I'm afraid it isn't enough simply to scare them."

"But they aren't going to get home! We know that!"

"Suppose they do make it." Sandoval began to talk, a bit louder and much faster. The night wind roared around his words. "Let's play with ideas a while. Suppose Toktai pushes on south-eastward. It's hard to see what could stop him. His men can live

off the country, even the deserts, far more handily than Coronado or any of those boys. He hasn't terribly far to go before he reaches a high-grade neolithic people, the agricultural Pueblo tribes. That will encourage him all the more. He'll be in Mexico before August. Mexico's just as dazzling now as it was—will be—in Cortez' day. And even more tempting: the Aztecs and Toltecs are still settling who's to be master, with any number of other tribes hanging around ready to help a newcomer against both. The Spanish guns made, will make, no real difference, as you'll recall if you've read Diaz. The Mongols are as superior, man for man, as any Spaniard. . . . Not that I imagine Toktai would wade right in. He'd doubtless be very polite, spend the winter, learn everything he could. Next year he'd go back north, sail home, and report to Kubilai that some of the richest, most gold-stuffed territory on earth was wide open for conquest!"

"How about the other Indians?" put in Everard. "I'm vague on them."

"The Mayan New Empire is at its height. A tough nut to crack, but a correspondingly rewarding one. I should think, once the Mongols got established in Mexico, there'd be no stopping them. Peru has an even higher culture at this moment, and much less

organization than Pizarro faced; the Quechua-Aymar, the so-called Inca race, are still only one power down there among several.

"And then, the land! Can you visualize what a Mongol tribe would make of the Great Plains?"

"I can't see them emigrating in hordes," said Everard. There was that about Sandoval's voice which made him uneasy and defensive. "Too much Siberia and Alaska in the way."

"Worse obstacles have been overcome. I don't mean they'd pour in all at once. It might take them a few centuries to start mass immigration, as it will take the Europeans. I imagine a string of clans and tribes being established in the course of some years, all down western North America. Mexico and Yucatan get gobbled up—or, more likely, become khanates. The herding tribes move eastward as their own population grows and as new immigrants arrive. Remember, the Yuan dynasty is due to be overthrown in less than a century. That'll put additional pressure on the Mongols in Asia to go elsewhere. And Chinese will come here too, to farm and to share in the gold."

"I should think, if you don't mind my saying so," Everard broke in softly, "that you of all people wouldn't want to hasten the conquest of America."

"It'd be a different conquest,"

said Sandoval. "I don't care about the Aztecs; if you study them, you'll agree that Cortez did Mexico a favor. It'd be rough on other, more harmless tribes too—for a while. And yet, the Mongols aren't such devils. Are they? A Western background prejudices us. We forget how much torture and massacre the Europeans were enjoying at the same time.

"The Mongols are quite a bit like the old Romans, really. Same practice of depopulating areas that resist, but respecting the rights of those who make submission. Same armed protection and competent government. Same unimaginative, uncreative national character; but the same vague awe and envy of true civilization. The *Pax Mongolica*, right now, unites a bigger area, and brings more different peoples into stimulating contact, than that piddling Roman Empire ever imagined.

"As for the Indians, remember, the Mongols are herdsmen. There won't be anything like the unsolvable conflict between hunter and farmer that made the white man destroy the Indian. The Mongol hasn't got race prejudices, either. And after a little fighting, the average Navajo, Cherokee, Seminole, Algonquin, Chippewa, Dakota, will be glad to submit and become allied. Why not? He'll get horses, sheep, cattle, textiles, metallurgy. He'll outnumber the invaders, and be on

much more nearly equal terms with them, than with white farmers and machine-age industry. And there'll be the Chinese, I repeat, leavening the whole mixture, teaching civilization and sharpening wits—

"Good God, Manse! When Columbus gets here, he'll find his Grand Cham all right! The Sachem Khan of the strongest nation on earth!"

Sandoval stopped. Everard listened to the gallows-creak of branches in the wind. He looked into the night for a long while before he said, "It could be. Of course, we'd have to stay in this century till the crucial point was past. Our own world wouldn't exist. Wouldn't ever have existed."

"It wasn't such a hell of a good world anyway," said Sandoval, as if in dream.

"You might think about your . . . oh . . . parents. They'd never have been born either."

"They lived in a tumbledown hogan. I saw my father crying once, because he couldn't buy shoes for us in winter. My mother died of T.B."

Everard sat unstirring. It was Sandoval who shook himself and jumped to his feet with a rattling kind of laugh. "What have I been mumbling? It was just a yarn, Manse. Let's turn in. Shall I take first watch?"

Everard agreed, but lay long awake.

The scooter had jumped two days futureward and now hovered invisibly far up to the naked eye. Around it, the air was thin and sharply cold. Everard shivered as he adjusted the electronic telescope. Even at full magnification, the caravan was little more than specks toiling across green immensity. But no one else in the Western Hemisphere could have been riding horses.

He twisted in the saddle to face his companion. "So now what?"

Sandoval's broad countenance was unreadable. "Well, if our demonstration didn't work—"

"It sure as hell didn't! I swear they're moving south twice as fast as before. Why?"

"I'd have to know all of them a lot better than I do, as individuals, to give you a real answer, Manse. But essentially it must be that we challenged their courage. A warlike culture, nerve and hardihood its only absolute virtues . . . what choice have they got but to go on? If they retreated before a mere threat, they'd never be able to live with themselves."

"But Mongols aren't idiots! They didn't conquer everybody in sight by bull strength, but by jolly well understanding military principles better. Toktai should retreat, report to the Emperor what he saw, and organize a bigger expedition."

"The men at the ships can do that," Sandoval reminded. "Now

that I think about it, I see how grossly we underestimated Toktai. He must have set a date, presumably next year, for the ships to go home if he doesn't return. When he finds something interesting along the way, like us, he can dispatch an Indian with a letter to the base camp."

Everard nodded. It occurred to him that he had been rushed into this job, all the way down the line, with never a pause to plan it as he should have done. Hence this botch. But how much blame must fall on the subconscious reluctance of John Sandoval? After a minute Everard said: "They may even have smelled something fishy about us. The Mongols were always good at psychological warfare."

"Could be. But what's our next move?"

*Swoop down from above, fire a few blasts from the Forty-first Century energy gun mounted in this timecycle, and that's the end. . . . No, by God, they can send me to the exile planet before I'll do any such thing. There are decent limits.*

"We'll rig up a more impressive demonstration," said Everard.

"And if it flops too?"

"Shut up! Give it a chance!"

"I was just wondering." The wind harried under Sandoval's words. "Why not cancel the expedition instead? Go back in time a couple of years and persuade

Kubilai Khan it isn't worthwhile sending explorers eastward. Then all this would never have happened."

"You know Patrol regs forbid us to make historical changes."

"What do you call this we're doing?"

"Something specifically ordered by supreme HQ. Perhaps to correct some interference elsewhere, elsewhen. How should I know? I'm only a step on the evolutionary ladder. They have abilities a million years hence that I can't even guess at."

"Father knows best," murmured Sandoval.

Everard set his jaws. "The fact remains," he said, "the court of Kubilai, the most powerful man on earth, is more important and crucial than anything here in America. No, you rang me in on this miserable job, and now I'll pull rank on you if I must. Our orders are to make these people give up their exploration. What happens afterward is none of our business. So they don't make it home. We won't be the proximate cause, any more than you're a murderer if you invite a man to dinner and he has a fatal accident on the way."

"Stop quacking and let's get to work," snapped Sandoval.

Everard sent the scooter gliding forward. "See that hill?" he pointed after a while. "It's on Toktai's line of march, but I think

he'll camp a few miles short of it tonight, down in that little meadow by the stream. The hill will be in his plain view, though. Let's set up shop on it."

"And make fireworks? It'll have to be pretty fancy. Those Cathayans know about gunpowder. They even have military rockets."

"Small ones. I know. But when I assembled my gear for this trip, I packed away some fairly versatile gadgetry, in case my first attempt failed."

The hill bore a sparse crown of pine trees. Everard landed the scooter among them and began to unload boxes from its sizable baggage compartments. Sandoval helped, wordless. The horses, Patrol trained, stepped calmly off the framework stalls which had borne them and started grazing along the slope.

After a while the Indian broke his silence. "This isn't my line of work. What are you rigging?"

Everard patted the small machine he had half assembled. "It's adapted from a weather-control system used in the Cold Centuries era upstairs. A potential distributor. It can make some of the damndest lightning you ever saw, with thunder to match."

"Mmm . . . the great Mongol weakness." Suddenly Sandoval grinned. "You win. We might as well relax and enjoy this."

"Fix us a supper, will you, while I put the gimmick together?"

No fire, naturally. We don't want any mundane smoke . . . Oh, yes, I also have a mirage projector. If you'll change clothes and put on a hood or something at the appropriate moment, so you can't be recognized, I'll paint a mile-high picture of you, half as ugly as life."

"How about a P.A. system? Navajo chants can be fairly alarming, if you don't know it's just a *yeibichai* or whatever."

"Coming up!"

The day waned. It grew murky under the pines; the air was chill and pungent. At last Everard devoured a sandwich and watched, through his binoculars, the Mongol vanguard check that campsite he had predicted. Others came riding in with their day's catch of game and went to work cooking. The main body showed up at sundown, posted itself efficiently, and ate. Toktai was indeed pushing hard, using every daylight moment. As darkness closed down, Everard glimpsed outposts, mounted and with strung bows. He could not keep up his own spirits, however hard he tried. He was bucking men who had shaken the earth.

Early stars glittered above snowpeaks. It was time to begin work.

"Got our horses tethered, Jack? They might panic. I'm fairly sure the Mongol horses will! . . . Okay, here goes." Everard flipped



a main switch and squatted by the dim-lit control dials of his apparatus.

First there was the palest blue flicker between earth and sky. Then the lightnings began, tongue after forked tongue leaping, trees smashed at a blow, the mountain-sides rocking under their noise. Everard threw out ball lightning, spheres of flame which whirled and curvetted, trailing sparks, shooting across to the camp and exploding above it till the sky seemed white-hot.

Deafened and half blinded, he managed to project a sheet of fluorescing ionization. Like northern lights the great banners curled, bloody red and bone white, hissing under the repeated thunder-cracks. Sandoval trod forth. He had stripped to his pants, daubed clay on his body in archaic patterns; his face was not veiled after all, but smeared with earth and twisted into something Everard would not have known. The machine scanned him and altered its patterns. That which stood forth against the aurora was taller than a mountain. It moved in a shuffling dance, from horizon to horizon and back to the sky, and it wailed and barked in a falsetto more loud than thunder.

Everard crouched beneath the lurid light, his fingers stiff on the control board. He knew a primitive fear of his own; the dance woke things he had forgotten.

*Judas priest! If this doesn't make them quit—*

His mind returned to him. He even looked at his watch. Half an hour . . . give them another fifteen minutes, in which the display tapered off . . . They'd surely stay in camp till dawn rather than blunder wildly out in the dark, they had that much discipline. So keep everything under wraps for several hours more, then administer the last stroke to their nerves by a single electric bolt smiting a tree right next to them.

. . . Everard waved Sandoval back. The Indian sat down, panting harder than his exertions seemed to warrant.

When the noise was gone, Everard said, "Nice show, Jack." His voice sounded tinny and strange in his ears.

"I hadn't done anything like that for years," muttered Sandoval. He struck a match, startling noise in the quietness. The brief flame showed his lips gone thin. Then he shook out the match and only his cigaret-end glowed.

"Nobody I knew, on the reservation, took that stuff seriously," he went on after a moment. "A few of the older men wanted us boys to learn it to keep the custom alive. To remind us we were still a people. But mostly our idea was to pick up some change by dancing for tourists."

There was a longer pause. Everard doused the projector com-

pletely. In the murk that followed, Sandoval's cigaret waxed and waned, a tiny red Algol.

"Tourists!" he said at last.

After more minutes: "Tonight I was dancing for a purpose. It meant something. I never felt that way before."

Everard was silent.

Until one of the horses, which had plunged at its halter's end during the performance and was still nervous, whinnied.

Everard looked up. Night met his eyes. "Did you hear anything, Jack?"

The flashlight beam speared him.

An instant he stared blinded at it. Then he sprang erect, cursing and snatching for his stun pistol. A shadow ran from behind one of the trees. It struck him in the ribs. He lurched back. The beam gun flew to his hand. He shot at random.

The flashlight swept about once more. Everard glimpsed Sandoval. The Navajo had not donned his weapons again. Unarmed, he dodged the sweep of a Mongol blade. The swordsman ran after him. Sandoval reverted to Patrol judo. He went to one knee. Clumsy afoot, the Mongol slashed, missed, and ran straight into a shoulder block to the belly. Sandoval rose with the blow. The heel of his hand jolted upward to the Mongol's chin. The helmeted head snapped back. Sandoval

chopped a hand at the Adam's apple, yanked the sword from its owner's grasp, turned and parried a cut from behind.

A voice yammered above the Mongol yipping, orders. Everard backed away. He had knocked one attacker out with a bolt from his pistol. There were others between him and the scooter. He circled to face them. A lariat curled around his shoulders. It tightened with one expert heave. He went over. Four men piled on him. He saw half a dozen lance butts crack down on Sandoval's head, then there wasn't time for anything but fighting. Twice he got to his feet, but his stun gun was gone by now, the Mauser was plucked from its holster, the little men were pretty good at *yawara*-style combat themselves. They dragged him down and hit him with fists, boots, dagger pommels. He never quite lost consciousness, but he finally stopped caring.

Toktai struck camp before dawn. The first sun saw his troop wind between scattered copses on a broad valley floor. The land was turning flat and arid, the mountains to the right farther away, fewer snowpeaks visible and those ghostly in a pale sky.

The hardy small Mongol horses trotted ahead, plop of hoofs, squeak and jingle of harness. Looking back, Everard saw the line as a compact mass; lances

rose and fell, pennants and plumes and cloaks fluttered beneath, and under that were the helmets, with a brown slit-eyed face and a grotesquely painted cuirass visible here and there. No one spoke, and he couldn't read any of those expressions.

His brain felt sandy. They had left his hands free, but lashed his ankles to the stirrups, and the cord chafed. They had also stripped him naked—sensible precaution, who knew what instruments might be sewn into his garments?—and the Mongol garb given him in exchange was ludicrously small, the seams had had to be slit before he could even get the tunic on.

The projector and the scooter lay back at the hill. Toktai would not take any risks with those things of power. He had had to roar down several of his own frightened warriors before they would even agree to bring the strange horses, with saddle and bedroll, riderless among the pack mares.

Hoofs thudded rapidly. One of the bowmen flanking Everard grunted and moved his pony a little aside. Li Tai-Tsung rode close.

The Patrolman gave him a dull stare. "Well?" he said.

"I fear your friend will not waken again," answered the Chinese. "I made him a little more comfortable."

*But lying strapped on an improvised litter between two ponies, unconscious. . . . Yes, concussion, when they clubbed him last night. A Patrol hospital could put him to rights soon enough. But the nearest Patrol office is in Cambaluc, and I can't see Toktai letting me go back to the scooter and use its radio. John Sandoval is going to die here, six hundred and fifty years before he was born.*

Everard looked into cool brown eyes, interested, not unsympathetic, but alien to him. It was no use, he knew; arguments which were logical in his culture were gibberish today; but one had to try. "Can you, at least, not make Toktai understand what ruin he is going to bring on himself, on his whole people, by this?"

Li stroked his fork beard. "It is plain to see, honored sir, your nation has arts unknown to us," he said. "But what of it? The barbarians—" he gave Everard's Mongol guards a quick glance, but evidently they didn't understand the many kingdoms superior to them in every way but fighting skill. Now already we know that you, ah, amended the truth when you spoke of a hostile empire near these lands. Why should your king try to frighten us away with a falsehood, did he not have reason to fear us?"

Everard spoke with care: "Our glorious emperor dislikes bloodshed. But if you force him—"

"Please." Li looked pained. He waved one slender hand, as if brushing off an insect. "Say what you will to Toktai, and I shall not interfere. It would not sadden me to return home; I came only under Imperial orders. But let us two, speaking confidentially, not insult each other's intelligence. Do you not see, eminent lord, that there is no possible harm with which you can threaten these men? Death they despise; even the most lingering torture must kill them in time; even the most disgraceful mutilation can be made as naught by a man willing to bite through his tongue and die. Toktai sees eternal shame if he turns back at this stage of events, and a good chance of wealth if he continues."

Everard sighed. His own humiliating capture had indeed been the turning point. The Mongols had been very near bolting at the thunder-show. Many had groveled and wailed (and from now on would be all the more aggressive, to erase that memory). Toktai charged the source as much in horror as defiance; a few men and horses had been able to come along. Li himself was partly responsible: scholar, skeptic, familiar with sleight-of-hand and pyrotechnic displays, the Chinese had helped hearten Toktai to attack before one of those thunderbolts did strike home.

*The truth of the matter is, son,*

*we misjudged these people. We should have taken along a Specialist, who'd have an intuitive feeling for the nuances of this culture. But no, we assumed a brainful of facts would be enough. Now what? A Patrol relief expedition may show up eventually, but Jack will be dead in another day or two. . . .* Everard looked at the stony warrior face on his left. *Quite probably I'll be also. They'd sooner scrag me than not.*

And even if he should (unlikely chance!) survive to be hauled out of this mess by another Patrol band—it would be tough to face his comrades. An Unattached agent, with all the special privileges of his rank, was expected to handle situations without extra help. Without leading valuable men to their deaths.

"So I advise you most sincerely not to attempt any more deceptions."

"What?" Everard turned back to Li.

"You do understand, do you not," said the Chinese, "that our native guides did flee? That you are now taking their place? But we expect to meet other tribes before long, establish communication—"

Everard nodded a throbbing head. The sunlight pierced his eyes. He was not astonished at the ready Mongol progress through scores of separate language areas. If you aren't fussy about grammar,

a few hours suffice to pick up the small number of basic words and gestures; thereafter you can take days or weeks actually learning to speak with your hired escort.

"—and obtain guides from stage to stage, as we did before," continued Li. "Any misdirection you may have given will soon be apparent. Toktai will punish it in most uncivilized ways. On the other hand, faithful service will be rewarded. You may hope in time to rise high in the provincial court, after the conquest."

Everard sat unmoving. The casual boast was like an explosion in his mind.

He had been assuming the Patrol would send another force. Obviously *something* was going to prevent Toktai's return. But was it so obvious? Why had this interference been ordered at all, if there were not—in some paradoxical way his Twentieth Century logic couldn't grasp—an uncertainty, a shakiness in the continuum right at this point?

Judas in hell! Perhaps the Mongol expedition was going to succeed! Perhaps all the future of an American Khanate which Sandoval had not quite dared dream of . . . was the real future.

There are quirks and discontinuities in space-time. The world lines can double back and bite themselves off, so that things and events appear causelessly, meaninglessly flutters soon lost and for-

gotten. Such as Manse Everard, marooned in the past with a dead John Sandoval, after coming from a future that never existed as the agent of a Time Patrol which never was.

At sundown their unmerciful pace had brought the expedition into sagebrush and greasewood country. The hills were steep and brown; dust smoked under hoofs; silvery-green bushes grew sparse, sweetening the air when bruised but offering little else.

Everard helped lay Sandoval on the ground. The Navajo's eyes were closed, his face sunken and hot. Sometimes he tossed and muttered a little, Everard squeezed water from a wetted cloth past the cracked lips, but could do nothing else.

The Mongols established themselves more gaily than of late. They had overcome two great sorcerers and suffered no further attack, and the implications were growing upon them. They went about their chores chattering to each other, and after a frugal meal they broke out the leather bags of *kumiss*.

Everard remained with Sandoval, near the middle of camp. Two guards had been posted on him, who sat with strung bows a few yards away but didn't talk. Now and then one of them would get up to tend the small fire. Presently silence fell on their



comrades too. Even this leathery host was tired, men rolled up and went to sleep, the outposts rode their rounds drowsy-eyed, other watchfires burned to embers while stars kindled overhead, a coyote yelped across miles. Everard covered Sandoval against the gathering cold: his own low flames showed rime frost on sage leaves. He huddled into a clack and wished his captors would at least give him back his pipe.

A footfall crunched dry soil. Everard's guards snatched arrows for their bows. Toktai moved into the light, his head bare above a mantle. The guards bent low.

Toktai halted. Everard looked up and then down again. The Noyon stared a while at Sandoval. Finally, almost gently, he said: "I do not think your friend will live to next sunset."

Everard grunted.

"Have you any medicines which might help?" asked Toktai. "There are some queer things in your saddlebags."

"I have a remedy against infection, and another against pain," said Everard mechanically. "But for a cracked skull, he must be taken to skillful physicians."

Toktai sat down and held his hands to the fire. "I'm sorry we have no surgeons along."

"You could let us go," said Everard without hope. "My chariot, back at the last camp, could get him to help in time."

"Now you know I can't do that!" Toktai chuckled. His pity for the dying man flickered out. "After all, Eburar, you started the trouble."

Since it was true, the Patrolman made no retort.

"I don't hold it against you," went on Toktai. "In fact, I'm still anxious to be friends. If I weren't, I'd stop for a few days and wring all you know out of you."

Everard flared up. "You could try!"

"And succeed, I think, with a man who has to carry medicine against pain." Toktai's grin was wolfish. "However, you may be useful as a hostage. And I do like your nerve. I'll even tell you an idea I have. I think maybe you don't belong to this rich southland at all. I think you're an adventurer, one of a little band of shamans. You have the southern king in your power, or hope to have, and don't want strangers interfering." Toktai spat into the fire. "There are old stories about that sort of thing, and finally a hero overthrew the wizard. Why not me?"

Everard sighed. "You will learn why not, Noyon." He wondered how correct that was.

"Oh, now." Toktai clapped him on the back. "Can't you tell me even a little? There's no blood feud between us. Let's be friends."

Everard jerked a thumb at Sandoval.

"It's a shame, that," said Toktai, "but he would keep on resisting an officer of the Kha Khan. Come, let's have a drink together, Eburar. I'll send a man for a bag."

The Patrolman made a face. "That's no way to pacify me!"

"Oh, your people don't like *kumiss*? I'm afraid it's all we have. We drank up our wine long ago."

"You could let me have my whisky." Everard looked at Sandoval again, and out into night, and felt the cold creep inward. "God, but I could use that!"

"Eh?"

"A drink of our own. We had some in our saddlebags."

"Well —" Toktai hesitated. "Very well. Come, we'll fetch it."

The guards followed their chief and their prisoner, through the brush and the sleeping warriors, up to a pile of assorted gear also under guard. One of the latter sentries ignited a stick in his fire to give Everard some light. The Patrolman's back muscles tensed — arrows were aimed at him now, drawn to the barb—but he squatted and went through his own stuff, careful not to move fast. When he had both canteens of Scotch, he returned to his own place.

Toktai sat down across the fire. He watched Everard pour a shot into the canteen cap and toss it off. "Smells odd," he said.

"Try." The Patrolman handed over the canteen.

It was an impulse of sheer loneliness. Toktai wasn't such a bad sort. Not in his own terms. And when you sit by your dying partner, you'd drink with the devil himself, just to keep from thinking. The Mongol sniffed dubiously, looked back at Everard, paused, and then raised the bottle to his lips with a bravura gesture.

"Whoo-oo-oo!"

Everard scrambled to catch the flask before too much was spilled. Toktai gasped and spat. One guardsman nocked an arrow, the other sprang to lay a hard hand on Everard's shoulder, a sword gleamed high. "It's not poison!" the Patrolman exclaimed. "It's only too strong for him. See, I'll drink some more myself."

Toktai waved the guards back and glared from watery eyes. "What do you make that of?" he choked. "Dragon's blood?"

"Barley." Everard didn't feel like explaining distillation. He poured himself another slug. "Go ahead, drink your mare's milk."

Toktai smacked his lips. "It does warm you up, doesn't it? Like pepper." He reached out a grimy hand. "Give me some more."

Everard sat still for a few seconds. "Well?" growled Toktai.

The Patrolman shook his head. "I told you, it's too strong for Mongols."

"What? See here, you whey-faced son of a Turk—"

"On your head be it, then. I

warn you fairly, with your men here as witnesses, you will be sick tomorrow."

Toktai guzzled heartily, belched, and passed the canteen back. "Non-sense. I simply wasn't prepared for it, the first time. Drink up!"

Everard took his time. Toktai grew impatient. "Hurry along there. No, give me the other flask."

"Very well. You are the chief. But I beg you, don't try to match me draught for draught. You can't do it."

"What do you mean, I can't do it? Why, I've drunk twenty men senseless in Karakorum. None of your gutless Chinks, either: they were all Mongols." Toktai poured down a couple of ounces more.

Everard sipped with care. But he hardly felt the effect anyway, save as a burning along his gullet. He was too tightly strung. Suddenly he was glimpsing what might be a way out.

"Here, it's a cold night," he said, and offered his canteen to the nearest guardsman. "You lads have one to keep you warm."

Toktai looked up, a trifle muzzily. "Good stuff, this," he objected. "Too good for—" He remembered himself and snapped his words off short. Cruel and absolute the Mongol empire might be, but officers shared equally with the humblest of their men.

The warrior grabbed the jug, giving his chief a resentful look,

and slanted it to his mouth. "Easy, there," said Everard. "It's heady."

"Nothin's heady to me." Toktai poured a further dose into himself. "Sober as a bonze." He wagged his finger. "That's the trouble bein' a Mongol. You're so hardy you can't get drunk."

"Are you bragging or complaining?" said Everard. The first warrior fanned his tongue, resumed a stance of alertness, and passed the bottle to his companion. Toktai hoisted the other canteen again.

"Ahhh!" He stared, owlsh. "That was fine. Well, better get to sleep now. Give him back his liquor, men."

Everard's throat tightened. But he managed to leer. "Yes, thanks, I'll want some more," he said. "I'm glad you realize you can't take it."

"Wha'd'you mean?" Toktai glared at him. "No such thing as too much. Not for a Mongol!" He glugged afresh. The first guardsman received the other flask and took a hasty snort before it should be too late.

Everard sucked in a shaken breath. It might work out after all. It might.

Toktai was used to carousing. There was no doubt that he or his men could handle *kumiss*, wine, ale, mead, *kvass*, that thin beer miscalled rice wine, any beverage of this era. They'd know when they'd had enough, say goodnight,

and walk a straight line to their bedrolls. The trouble was, no substance merely fermented can get over about 24 proof—the process is stopped by its waste product—and most of what they brewed in the Thirteenth Century ran well under 5% alcohol, with a high foodstuff content to boot.

Scotch whisky is in quite a different class. If you try to drink that like beer, or even like wine, you are in trouble. Your judgment will be gone before you've noticed its absence, and consciousness follows soon after.

Everard reached for the canteen held by one of the guards. "Give me that!" he said. "You'll drink it all up!"

The warrior grinned and took another long gulp, before passing it on to his fellow. Everard stood up and made an undignified scrabble for it. A guard poked him in the stomach. He went over on his backside. The Mongols bawled laughter, leaning on each other. So good a joke called for another drink.

When Toktai folded, Everard alone noticed. The Noyon slid from a cross-legged to a recumbent position. The fire sputtered up long enough to show a silly smile on his face. Everard squatted wire-tense.

The end of one sentry came a few minutes later. He reeled, went on all fours, and began to jettison his dinner. The other one

turned, blinking, bumbling after a sword. "Wha's mattuh?" he groaned. "Wha' yuh done? Poison?"

Everard moved.

He had hopped over the fire and fallen on Toktai before the last guard realized it. The Mongol stumbled forward, crying out. Everard found Toktai's sword. It flashed from the scabbard as he bounded up. The warrior got his own blade aloft. Everard didn't like to kill a nearly helpless man. He stepped close, knocked the other weapon aside, and his fist clopped. The Mongol sank to his knees, retched, and slept.

Everard bounded away. Men stirred in the dark, calling. He heard hoofs drum, one of the mounted sentries racing to investigate. Somebody took a brand from an almost extinct fire and whirled it till it flared. Everard went flat on his belly. A warrior pelted by, not seeing him in the brush. He glided toward deeper darknesses. A yell behind him, a machine gun volley of curses, told that someone had found the Noyon.

Everard stood up and began to run.

The horses had been hobbled and turned out under guard as usual. They were a dark mass on the plain, which lay gray-white beneath a sky crowded with sharp stars. Everard saw one of the Mongol watchers gallop to meet

him. A voice barked: "What's happening?"

He pitched his answer high. "Attack on camp!" It was only to gain time, lest the horseman recognize him and fire an arrow. He crouched, visible as a hunched and cloaked shape. The Mongol reined in with a spurt of dust. Everard sprang.

He got hold of the pony's bridle before he was recognized. Then the sentry yelled and drew sword. He hewed downward. But Everard was on the left side. The blow from above came awkwardly, easily parried. Everard chopped in return and felt his edge go into meat. The horse reared in alarm. Its rider fell from the saddle. He rolled over and staggered up again, bellowing. Everard already had one foot in a pan-shaped stirrup. The Mongol limped toward him, blood running black in that light from a wounded leg. Everard mounted and laid the flat of his own blade on the horse's crupper.

He got going toward the herd. Another rider pounded to intercept him. Everard ducked. An arrow buzzed where he had been. The stolen pony plunged, fighting its unfamiliar burden. Everard needed a minute to get it under control again. The archer might have taken him then, by coming up and going at it hand to hand. But habit sent the man past at a gallop, shooting. He missed in the

dimness. Before he could turn, Everard was out of view in the dark.

The Patrolman uncoiled a lariat at the saddlebow and broke into the skittish herd. He roped the nearest animal, which accepted it with blessed meekness. Leaning over, he slashed the hobbles with his sword and rode off, leading the remount. They came out the other side of the herd and started north.

*A stern chase is a long chase, Everard told himself inappropriately. But they're bound to over-haul me if I don't lose 'em. Let's see, if I remember my geography, the lava beds lie northwest of here.*

He cast a glance behind. No one pursued yet. They'd need a while to organize themselves. However. . .

Thin lightnings winked from behind them. He felt a chill, deeper than the night cold. But he eased his pace. There was no more reason for hurry. That must be Manse Everard—

—who had returned to the Patrol vehicle and ridden it south in space and backward in time to this same instant.

That was cutting it fine, he thought. Patrol doctrine frowned on helping oneself thus. Too much danger of a closed causal loop, or of tangling past and future.

*But in this case, I'll get away with it. No reprimands, even.*

*Because it's to rescue Jack Sandoval, not myself. I've already gotten free. I could shake pursuit in the mountains, which I know and the Mongol's don't. The time-hopping is only to save my friend's life.*

*Besides (an upsurging bitterness), what's this whole mission been, except the future doubling back to create its own past? Without us, the Mongols might well have taken over America, and then there'd never have been us.*

The sky was enormous, crystal-line black, you rarely saw that many stars. The Great Bear flashed above hoar earth; hoof-beats rang through silence. Everard had not before felt so alone.

"And what am I doing back there?" he asked aloud.

The answer came to him, and he eased a little, fell into the rhythm of his horses and started eating miles. He wanted to get this over with. But what he must do turned out to be less bad than he had feared. The way it would be was this:

Toktai and Li Tai-Tsung never came home. But that was not because they perished at sea. It was because a sorcerer rode down from heaven and killed all their horses with thunderbolts, and smashed and burned their ships in the rivermouth. No Chinese sailor would venture across those tricky seas in whatever clumsy vessel could be built here; no Mongol would

think it possible to go home on foot. Indeed, it probably wasn't. The expedition would stay, marry into the Indians, live out their days. Chinook, Tlingit, Nootka, all the potlatch tribes, with their big seagoing canoes, lodges and copperworking, furs and cloths and haughtiness . . . well, a Mongol Noyon, even a Confucian scholar might live less happily and usefully than in creating such a life for such a race.

Everard nodded to himself. So much for that. What was harder to take than the thwarting of Toktai's blood-thirsty ambitions, was the truth about his own corps. Which was his own family and nation and reason for living. The distant supermen turned out to be not quite such idealists after all. They weren't merely safeguarding a perhaps divinely ordained history which led to them. Here and there they, too, meddled, to create their own past. . . . Don't ask if there ever was any "original" scheme of things. Keep your mind shut. Regard the rutted road mankind had to travel, and tell yourself that if it could be better in places, in others worse.

"It may be a crooked game," said Everard, "but it's the only one in town."

His voice came so loud, in that huge rime-white land, that he didn't speak any more. He clucked at his horse and rode a little faster northward.

*A terrible tale of a blackhearted scoundrel in the world's finest city, God save the dirty, dissolute place.*

# A DIVVIL WITH THE WOMEN

by Niall Wilde

WELL, I DON'T SUPPOSE YOU NOTICED that paragraph in the *Irish Independent* last March, did you now? A real terrible tale it told to any man sober enough to crawl but drunk enough to understand the whole of it.

Hold on to your glass while I tell you. This happens in Dublin itself which is the world's finest city, God save the dirty, dissolute place. And it happens to Patrick Magonigal who is the blackest-hearted scoundrel that ever got conceived behind a billboard.

The same is fair comment on Patrick because he has been back of the wall a dozen times for thievings, boozings and various felonies, and is a shame to his Church and a curse to his family. He is a right ugly darling with bad teeth and warts on his face and squinty eyes, long in the body and short in the legs, too small for an I.R.A. sodger and too big for a jockey. However, he is ideal for a wheel barrow when he takes a mind to work, which is never so

long as he has a penny for the beer.

This evening Patrick Magonigal is sitting in Sweeny's Bar near to Eden Quay and slowly drinking the contents of a purse which he has lifted out of a woman's hand-bag on the Donnybrook bus. It is a trick that has got him in trouble before and perhaps one of them psychiatrist fellers could explain it as revenge on the opposite sex because no woman can look at him without blowing her nose.

So Patrick is lurking in a dark corner coddling his only true love, that being a glass of porter. And his squinty eyes keep constant watch for any other glass abandoned half-full or lost track of by the muddle-minded. He is not the one to let a couple of drippings go down the drain so long as he's got a tongue to lap.

At eleven o'clock which is closing time Sweeny dutifully locks the front door and opens the back one, him being a law-abiding man who keeps the rules without inconven-

iening anybody. Customers drift in and out until midnight by which time the police-sergeant is due for his unofficial tot of whiskey and Patrick Magonigal has no desire to be seen or asked pointed questions.

Emptying his glass, he goes out and realizes when he gets into the night air that there was enough in the purse to take the legs off a man. He stumbles along the quay and doesn't like the looks of the Liffey which is sliding under the bridges all dark and wet and can whip a body out to sea before the saints have time to give it peace.

Leaning sidewise to help steer the feet, he gets away from the water, stops and shores up a wall. There he stands for quite a piece, hands in pockets and chin buried in collar while his squinty eyes scowl at the sable river. Farther along, the lights of O'Connell Street are flashing, but he isn't drawn that way because he wants to brood in darkness and think what all that porter could help him do to a woman if she'd let him.

He is still propping the brickwork and the exact time is between twelve and one o'clock when a stranger appears before him like a banshee risen from the cold earth.

"A fine, soft evening it is," says this feller.

He hasn't the brogue and is not of the Irish. And since he hasn't

waited for an introduction he can't be English either. Nor is he a Yank because he doesn't have a big tie dangling from his neck or a camera sitting on his belly.

"That it is too," says Patrick, peering hard in effort to decide whether chance acquaintanceship might gain him at least a free pint or at most a filched wallet.

"You can hunt the drink and the money right out of your mind," informs the stranger. "Because it'll be a far day when I bother with such childish evils. For the reason," he goes on, "that when I am bad I do it expert."

At that Patrick screws up his face and takes another bleary look at him and sees that this feller has thin, cruel features and a beaky nose and eyes that glitter like a tomcat's in the season. But there are no horns in evidence and not a tail either.

"Sure and you're talking like the Divvil himself," he says.

"You might be right at that too, Mr. Magonigal," says the other, showing pointed white teeth. "Particularly in view of the fact that my name is Shaitan. And where better could we meet than in Dublin which is a hell of a place especially on a wet Sunday morning?"

"Is it a poke in the eye you're after getting?" demands Patrick, bristling at this foreigner's contempt.

"Not at all at all," says Mr.



Shaitan, making a pacific gesture. "I am walking along the quay looking for a bold boy who'll give me a hand with some real dirty work. And then I see you. There's a proper spalpeen, I say to myself. Patrick Magonigal." He looks him over with shining orbs that are greener than the Kerry hills. "I want you to do me a favor."

"Well now," Patrick tells him, desirous of encouraging a profit, "it all depends what you have in mind."

"Bedad it's the easiest thing ever," assures Mr. Shaitan. "I have here a small bottle. I am wanting you to take it into a church which is open all night for the comfort of mortal sinners—" he gives a deep, sardonic laugh—"and fill it with holy water."

"And why mightn't you be doing it yourself?" inquires Patrick, not drunk enough to lack suspicion.

"Because," says Mr. Shaitan with the same sharp laugh, "I am allergic to the odor of sanctity which is more than a decent fiend can stand. Not to mention the holy moanings that are bad for my nerves."

"Sacred Heart!" comments Patrick. "If that's the sort of heretic you are, you do not need the holy water."

"I do too," contradicts Mr. Shaitan, leering. "By reason of the fact that I can use it to stir certain stubborn virgins."

Patrick wakes up at that because he has heard tell of peculiar potions employed for such a purpose, though to the best of his recollection they do not include holy water.

"How does it work?" he asks eagerly, him having a dozen test-subjects in mind.

"The technique is my own and not to be revealed," declares the other. "All I'm asking is for you to fill the bottle and mind your own affairs."

"You can go to hell," says Patrick, leaning back against the wall.

"That I will and in good time to deal with yourself," informs Mr. Shaitan, very confident. "And what with you spitting in your father's face at his wake you'll be down at the lowest and hottest level with all the bloody Protestants. That," he adds with considerable menace, "is when you'll wish you had a cooling friend amid the flames. For," he goes on, showing indecent relish, "they will be so terrible fierce that you won't be able to sit or stand and you'll dance an eternal jig while your frying rear jerks like a fiddler's elbow."

"Saints preserve us!" says Patrick, appalled by the picture.

"As if they would trouble," remarks the other, real sarcastic. "Them hairy fellers haven't heard a prayer from you since you were nine and that's so far back they'd swallow their haloes if you gave

them a nudge today. And more-over their full attention is elsewhere with what's going on every night in Howth and Clontarf and other parts." He chuckles with satisfaction. "I keep those boys busy and I'm telling you that myself."

By this time Patrick has the sinister feeling that this is not a lot of blarney and that he came out of Sweeny's at the wrong time. He starts weakening a bit, and Mr. Shaitan knows this and presses his advantage.

"Fill the bottle," he urges, "and bring it out the church to me. I'll reward you better than an American legacy could do it. I'll give you what you want more than anything on earth."

"Name it now," invites Patrick.

"I will make you irresistible to women."

"Bejzus, that'll be a miracle," Patrick says with bitterness born of experience.

"An easy reward, very easy," scoffs Mr. Shaitan. "It is possibly the simplest trick in my repertoire. I will make you completely and utterly irresistible and it's yourself who'll know it and none better."

"Give me the bottle," says Patrick, fizzing all over at the thought of coming conquests.

Wait now and I'll tell you: the two of them walk alongside the Liffey with Patrick going steady

because his legs are suddenly cold sober though his insides are as boozed as ever. Turning left, they reach a church that must go unnamed because of the scandal of it.

Stopping outside, Mr. Shaitan says, "Make a hearty wipe over it before you hand it to me because not a drop must touch my fingers."

He sits on the kerb and grins at the sky while Patrick goes inside.

There are only two worshippers at that hour so Patrick kneels behind them and says a few words to the saints by way of getting insurance-cover above as well as below.

Then coming out, he fills the bottle which goes glug-glug in the bowl. He corks it, dries it, goes down the steps and gives it to Mr. Shaitan.

"A-a-ah! Divvil a Christian you are this night," says Mr. Shaitan, his eyes gleaming as he pockets the bottle. Then he makes a mighty peculiar gesture at Patrick and adds, "For which I give you the promised reward."

With that he slips shadowlike down the street and lets go a hollow laugh that scares a garda who is standing in an alley doing what comes naturally.

Patrick feels himself all over and can't tell any different except that the strength is running out of him like beer from a busted barrel. There is no mirror available to show him what he has now ac-

quired that will kill all the women. But he is weakening so swift that he's likeliest to lie flat with a pound of candles burning around him.

Alarmed at this, he starts off at the best pace he can make, getting worse and worse and calling the saints to hold him until he can find a doctor. His pants start flapping and his boots slop loosely on his feet and his collar slides up toward his ears.

And just as he reaches the bridge he collapses on the bank beside the river and lays there swaddled in loose clothes.

The rest of it is what they put in the *Irish Independent*, which tells how one Patrick Magonigal is

believed to have torn off his clothes in a drunken frenzy and jumped into the Liffey which the gardai are now keeping watch upon for the body. And it tells how some heartless mother dumped her unwanted child in the suicide's clothing and left it there, the said child being a bouncing boy of three or four weeks and now in the care of the sweet sisters of the Convent of the Good Shepherd.

So that's where Patrick Magonigal is right now, flat on his back, struck speechless and denied the booze, kicking and mewling—while the holy nuns cannot resist cooing at him and tickling his toes and doing everything possible to show that women think him a broth of a boy.



### **To JULIA, not to gaze at Flyinge Sawcers**

Whenas my moone-struck JULIA spies  
 Strange *Crafte*, that hover in the Skyes,  
 Or elles traverse the *Bowle of Nighte*  
 More quicklie, thanne an *Arrow's Flight*,  
 Her cherrie lips doe widely gape  
 While *Sighes of Wonderment* escape.  
 How can poore *Herrick* steale a Kisse  
 From such an *Aperture*, as thyss?  
 Alas, that *Earthe's* most lovely Face  
 Should holde in it soe much of *Spaycel*

—ANTHONY BRODE

*To quote Maurice Renault, editor of F&SF's French edition: "Charles Henneberg's stories may be divided into two types. In the first, he bestrode the centuries recreating former civilizations in minute detail and transposing to them a science fiction theme. In the second, [of which The Blind Pilot is an example] he explored space considered as a source of marvels and terrors, turning the pages of the 'Dossier on galactic interracial relations.' In each case, he achieved a happy fusion between science fiction and fantasy, between future and legend."*

# THE BLIND PILOT

*by Charles Henneberg*

*(translated by Damon Knight)*

THE SHOP WAS LOW AND DARK, as if meant for someone who no longer knew day from night. Around it hung a scent of wax and incense, exotic woods and roses dried in darkness. It was in the cellar of one of the oldest buildings of the old radioactive district, and you had to walk down several steps before you reached a grille of Venerian sandalwood. A cone of Martian crystal lighted the sign:

## THE BLIND PILOT

The man who came in this morning, followed by a robot porter with a chest, was a half-crazy

old voyager, like many who have gazed on the naked blazing of the stars. He was back from the Aselli—at least, if not there, from the Southern Cross; his face was of wax, ravaged, graven, from lying too long on a keelson at the mercy of the ultraviolets, and in the black jungle of the planets.

The coffer was hewn from a heart-wood hard as brass, porous here and there. He had it set down on the floor, and the sides vibrated imperceptibly, as if a great captive bee were struggling inside.

"Look here," he said, giving a rap on the lid, "I wouldn't sell that there for a million credits, but I'm

needing to refloat myself, till I get my pay. They tell me you're an honest Yahoo. I'll leave this here in pawn and come back to get it in six days. What'll you give me?"

At the back of the shop, a young man raised his head. He was sitting in an old armchair stiff with flowered brocade. He looked like one of those fine Velasquez cavaliers, who had hands of steel, and were not ashamed to be beautiful; but a black bandage covered the upper part of his face.

"I'm no Yahoo," he answered coldly, "and I don't take live animals as pledges."

"Blind! You're blind!" stammered the newcomer.

"You saw my sign."

"Accident?"

"Out in the Pleiades."

"Sorry, shipmate!" said the traveler. But already he was scheming: "How'd you know there was an animal in there?"

"I'm blind—but not deaf."

The whole room was tingling with a crystalline vibration. Suddenly it stopped. The traveler wiped great drops of sweat from his forehead.

"Shipmate," he said, "that ain't really an animal. I'm holding onto that. I don't want to sell it to nobody. And if I don't have any money tonight, it's the jug for me. Understand? No more space voyages, no more loot, no more nothing. I'm an HZ, to be suspended."

"I get it," answered the quiet

voice. "How much?" it asked.

The other almost choked. "Will you really give me—?"

"Not a thing, I don't give anything for nothing, and I told you before, I'm not interested in your cricket in a cage. But I can let you have five thousand credits, no more, on your shipping papers. In six days, when you come back to get them, you'll pay me five hundred credits extra. That's all."

"You're *worse* than a Yahoo!"

"No. I'm blind." He added grimly, "My accident was caused by a fool who hadn't insured his rocket. I don't like fools."

"But," said the adventurer, shuffling his feet, "how can you check my papers?"

"My brother's over there. Come on out, Jacky."

A sharp little grin appeared in the shadows. Out between a lunar harmonium in a meteorite, and a dark Terrestrial cloth on which a flayed martyr had bled, came a cripple mounted on a little carriage—legless, with stumps of arms, propelling himself with the aid of two hooks: a malicious little old man of twelve.

"Mutant," said the blind man curtly. "But he makes out, with his prosthetics. Papers in order, Jacky?"

"Sure, North. And dirtier than a dustrag."

"That only means they've seen good use. Give him his five thousand credits."

The blind man pressed a button. A cabinet opened, revealing a sort of dumb-waiter. In the top half there was a little built-in strong box; in the bottom crouched a Foramen Chimera, the most bloodthirsty of beasts, half cat, half harpy.

The traveler jumped back.

The cripple rolled himself over to the strong box, grabbed up a bundle of credits and blew on the monster's nose. It purred.

"You see, the money's well guarded here," said North.

"Can I leave my chest with you, anyhow?" asked the traveler humbly.

So the chest remained. Using the dumb-waiter, the cripple sent it up to the small apartment which the two brothers shared in the penthouse of the building. According to its owner, "the beast which was not really an animal" was in hibernation; it had no need of food. The porous wood allowed enough air to pass. But the box had to be kept in a dark place. "It lives in the great deeps," he had explained; "it can't stand daylight."

The building was really very old, with many elevators and closets. The mutants and cripples of the last war, who lived there because it was cheap, accommodated themselves to it. North dragged the chest into the strong room next to his study.

That evening, the free movie in the building was showing an old stereo film, not even sensorial, about the conquest of the Pleiades, and Jacky announced that he wanted to see it. He asked his brother, "You don't suppose that animal will get cold in there?"

"What are you talking about? It's in hibernation."

"Anyhow," said Jacky spitefully, "we're not getting paid to keep it in fuel."

The movie lasted till midnight, and when Jacky came back, there was a full moon. The boy testified later that he had been a little over-excited. A white glimmer flooded the upper landing, and he saw that the window of the "garret," as they called his brother's study, was masked with a black cloth. Jacky supposed North had taken this extra precaution on account of the animal; he pushed himself forward with his hooks, and knocked on the door, but no one answered, and there was no key in the lock.

He told himself then that maybe North had gone down six stories to the bar in the building, and he decided to wait. He sat on the landing; the night was mild, and he would not have traded the air at that height for any amount of conditioned and filtered atmospheres. The silver star floated overhead in the black sky. Jacky mused that "it means something after all, that shining going on just the same for  $x$  years—that

moon that's seen so many old kings, and poets, and lovers' stories. The cats that yowl at night must feel it; and the dogs too." In the lower-class buildings, there were only robot-dogs. Jacky longed for a real dog—after all, he was only twelve. But mutants couldn't own living animals.

And then . . .

(On the magnetic tape where Jacky's deposition was taken down, it seemed that at that moment the boy began to choke. The recording was interrupted, and the next reel began: "Thanks for the coffee. It was good and bitter.")

He had heard an indefinable sound, very faint . . . just the sound of the sea-tide in a bed of shells. It grew, and grew . . . At the same time (though he couldn't say how) there were images. A pearl-colored sky, and green crystal waves, with crests of sparkling silver. Jacky felt no surprise; he had just left the stereo theater. Perhaps someone in the building opposite had turned on a sensorial camera—and the vibrations, the waves, were striking their landing by accident.

But the melody swelled, and the boy sank under the green waves. It stank of seaweed and fish. . . Carried along by the currents, the little cripple felt light and free. Banks of rustling diatoms parted for him; a blue phosphorescence haloed the medusas and starfish, and pearly blue

anemones formed a forest. Grazed by a transparent jellyfish, Jacky felt a nettle-like burning. The shadow of a hammerhead shark went by, and scattered a twinkling cloud of smelt. Farther down, the shadow grew denser, more opaque and mysterious—caverns gaped in a coral reef. The tentacle of an octopus lashed the water, and the cripple shuddered.

He found himself thrown back against the hull of a ship, half buried in the sand. A little black-and-gold siren, garlanded with barnacles, smiled under the prow; and he fell, transported, against a breach that spilled out a pirate treasure, coffers full of barbaric jewels. Heaps of bones were whitening at the bottom of the hold, and a skull smiled with empty sockets. This must be an amateur film, Jacky thought: a little too realistic. He freed himself, pushed away as hard as he could with his hooks, rose to the surface at last—and almost cried out.

The sky above him was not that of Earth. North had told him how that other dark ocean looked—the sub-ether. The stars were naked and dazzling. Reefs, that were burning meteors, sprang up out of nowhere. And the planets seemed to whirl near enough to touch—one was ruby, another orange, still another a tranquil blue; Saturn danced in its airy ring.

Jacky thrust his hooks out before him to push away those torches.

In so doing, he slipped and rolled across the landing. The door opened a second later—he hadn't had time to fall three steps, but this time he wasn't diving alone: beside him, in the hideously reddened water, whirled and danced the body of a disjointed puppet, with gullied features in a face of wax.

Jacky raised his head. North stood on the sill, terrible, pale as a statue of old ivory; the black bandage cut his face in two. He called, "Who's there? Answer me, or I'll call the militia!"

His voice was loud and angry. North, who always spoke so softly to Jacky. . . .

"It's me—Jack," said the boy, trembling. "I was coming back, and I missed a step . . ."

("I told a lie," said Jacky later, to the militiamen who were questioning him. And he stared into their eyes with a look of open defiance. "That's right, sure, I told a lie. Because I knew he'd kill me.")

The next morning there was no blood and no corpse on the landing. Only a smell of seaweed. . . .

Jacky was filling the coffee cups, in the back of the shop, while the television news broadcast was on. Toward the end, the announcer reported that the body of a drowned man had been taken from the harbor. The dead man's face appeared on the tiny screen, at the moment North came into the shop.

"Hey, look at that!" called the cripple. "Your five thousand credits are done for."

"What's that?" asked his brother, picking up his china cup and his buttered bread with delicate accuracy.

"The character with the pet. They've just fished him out of the channel. Guess what, they don't know who he is: somebody swiped his wallet."

"A dead loss," said the older. "You're certain he's the one?"

"He's still on the screen. He isn't a pretty sight."

An indefinable expression passed over North's mobile features. "You'd think he was relieved," Jacky told himself. Aloud, he asked, "What do we do with the animal?"

"Does it bother you?" asked North, a little too negligently.

"Me, old man?" said the cripple in a clownish tone, imitating a famous fat actor. "As long as there's no wrinkles in my belly! Where did he come from?"

"He talked about the Aselli," said North, reaching with a magician's deftness for another slice of bread. "And a lot of other things, too. What are you up to this morning? Got any work to do?"

"Not much! The Stimpson order to send out. A crate of lunar bells coming in. I ought to go to the Reeducation Center, too."

"Okay. Can you bring me back



a copy of the weekly news disc?"  
"Sure."

But Jacky didn't go to the Re-education Center that morning, nor to his customers. With his carriage perched on the slidewalk, he rode to Astronautics Headquarters, a building among others, and had some difficulty getting upstairs in the elevator, amid the students' jibes. Some of them asked, "You want to do the broad jump in a rocket?" And others, "He thinks these are the good old days, when everybody was hunting for round-bottoms to send to the Moon!" It was not really spiteful, and Jacky was used to it.

He felt a touch of nostalgia, not for himself but for North—he knew North would never come here again. The walls were covered with celestial charts, microfilm shelves rose from one floor to the next, and in all the glass cases there were models of spaceship engines, from the multi-stage rockets and sputniks, all the way up to the great ships that synthesized their own fissionables. Jacky arrived all out of breath in front of the robot card-sorter, and handed it his card.

"The Aselli," spat the robot. "Asellus Borealis? Asellus Australis? Gamma Cancri or Delta Cancri?"

"Nothing else out there?"

"Yes, Alphard, longitude twenty-six degrees nineteen minutes. Alpha Hydrae."

"Hydra, that's an aquatic monster? Is it a water planet? Read me the card."

"There is little to tell," crackled the robot. "The planet is almost unexplored, its surface being composed of oceans."

"Fauna? Flora?"

"Without evidence to the contrary, those of oceans in general."

"Intelligent life?"

The robot made a face with its revolving spheres. "Without evidence to the contrary, none. Nor any human beings. Nothing but sea-lions and manatees."

"Manatees? What are they?" asked Jacky, suddenly apprehensive.

"Herbivorous sirenian mammals which live on Earth, along the shores of Africa and America. Manatees sometimes grow as long as three meters, and frequent the estuaries of rivers."

"But—'sirenians'?"

"A genus of mammals, related to the cetaceans, and comprising the dugongs, manatees, and so on."

Jacky's eyebrows went up and he cried, "I thought it came from 'siren'!"

"So it does," said the robot laconically. "Fabulous monsters, half woman, half bird or fish. With their sweet singing, they lured voyagers onto the reefs—"

"Where did this happen?"

"On Earth, where else?" said the robot, offended. "Between the

isle of Capri and the coast of Italy. Young man, you don't know quite what you mean to ask."

But Jacky knew.

On his return, as he expected, he found the shop closed and a note tacked to the door: "The pilot is out." Jacky hunted in his pockets for the key, slipped inside. All was calm and ordinary, except for that smell which ruled now like the mistress of the house, the smell that you breathe on the beaches, in little coves, in summer: seaweed, shells, fish, perhaps a little tar. Jacky set the table, set to work in the kitchenette and prepared a nice little snack, lobster salad and ravioli. Secretive and spiteful, imprisoned among the yellowing antiques of the shop, the young cripple really loved them all. When everything was ready—fresh flowers in the vases, the ravioli hot, ice cubes in the glasses—Jacky rang three times, according to custom. No one answered. Everything was a pretext for a secret language between the two mutilated brothers, who adored each other; the first stroke of the bell meant: "The meal is ready, his lordship may come down," the second: "I'm hungry," and the third: "I'm hungry, hungry!" The fourth had almost the sense of: "Have you had an accident?"

Jacky hesitated a moment, then pressed the button. The silence was deep among the crystallized

plants and the gems of seven planets. Did this mean that North was really away? The cripple hoisted himself into the dumb-waiter and rode up to the penthouse.

On the upper landing, the scent had changed; it had flowered now into unknown spices, and it would have taken a more expert observer than Jacky to recognize the aromatics of the fabulous past: nard, aloes and benzoin, the bitter thyme of Sheba's Belkis, the myrrh and olibanum of Cleopatra.

In the midst of all this, the music was real, almost palpable, like a pillar of light, and Jacky asked himself how it could be that the others, on the floors below, didn't hear it.

That morning, North Ellis had closed the door of the dark room behind him, turned the key and shot the bolt. His blind man's hands, strong and slender, executed these movements with machine-like precision, but he was panting a little, and in spite of old habit, had almost missed the landing. He was so pressed . . . but he had to foresee everything. Jacky . . . Resting his back against the door, North gave a moment's thought to the idea of sending Jacky to Europe. Their aunt, their mother's sister, lived somewhere in a little village with a musical name. He felt responsible for Jacky.

He swept away these preoccupa-

pations like dead leaves, and walked toward the dark corner where the chest lay under a black cloth. His fingers crept over the porous wood which scented his palms.

"You're there," he said in a cold, harsh voice. "You've been waiting for me, you!"

The being that crouched at the heart of the shadows did not immediately answer, but the concentric waves of the music swelled out. And the man who had tumbled to earth with broken wings, awaited neither by his mother, dead of leukemia, nor by a Russian girl who had laughed, turning her primrose face beside a white neck . . . the blind pilot felt himself neither deprived nor unhappy.

"You're beautiful, aren't you?"  
"You're very beautiful! Your voice . . ."

"What else would you like to know?" responded the waves, growing stronger. "You are sightless, I faceless. I told you, yesterday when you opened the strong room: I am all that streams and sings. The glittering cascades, the torrents of ice that break on the columbines, the reflections of the multiple moons on the oceans . . . And I am the ocean. Let yourself float on my wave. Come . . ."

"You made me kill that man, yesterday."

"What is a man? I speak to you of tumbling abysses, dark and lu-

minous by turns, of the crucibles where new life is forged, and you answer me with the death of a spaceman! Anyhow, he deserved it: he captured me, imprisoned me, and he had come back to separate us!"

"Separate us . . ." said North. "Do you think that's possible?"

"No—if you follow me."

The central melody grew piercing. It was like a spire, or a bridge over a limitless space. And the unconscious part of the human soul darted out to encounter that harmony. The wheeling abyss opened, it was peopled with trembling nebulae, with diamonds and roses of fire . . .

North toppled into it.

. . . It was strange to recognize, in this *n*th dimension, the crowds of stars he had encountered in real voyages—the glacial scintillation of Polaris, the scattered pearls of Orion's Belt. North marveled to find himself again in this night, weightless and free, without spacesuit or rocket. Jets of photons bore him on immense wings. The garret, the mutants' building, the Earth? He laughed at them. The Boreal Dragon twisted its spirals in a spray of stars. He crossed in one bound an abyss streaming with fire—Berenice's Hair—and cut himself on the blue sapphire of Vega in the Lyre. He was not climbing alone: the living music wound him in its rings.

"Do you think to know the Infinite?" said the voice enfolded in the harmonies. "Poor Earthlings, who claim to have discovered everything! Because you've built heavy machines that break all equilibrium, that burst into flame and fall, and martyr your vulnerable human flesh? Come, I'll show you what we can see, we obscure and immobile ones, in the abysses, since what is on high is also down below . . ."

The star-spirals and the harmonies surged up. In the depths of his night, North gazed upon those things which the pilots, constrained by their limited periscope screens, never saw: oceans of rubies, furnaces of emeralds, dark stars, constellations coiled like luminous dragons. Meteorites were a rain of motionless streaks. Novas came to meet him; they exploded and shattered in sidereal tornadoes, the giants and dwarfs fell again in incandescent cascades. Space-time was nothing but a flaming chalice.

"Higher! Faster!" sang the voice.

All that passed beyond vertigo and the tipsiness of the flesh. North felt himself tumbled, dissolved in the astral foam, he was nothing but an atom in the infinite.

"Higher! Faster!"

Was it at that moment, among the dusty arcs, for down at the bottom of the abyss, at the heart of his being, that he felt that icy

breath, that sensation of horror? It was more than unclean. It was as if he had leaped over the abysses and the centuries, passed beyond all human limits—and ended at this. At nothingness, the void. He was down at the bottom of a well, in utter darkness, and his mouth was full of blood. Rhythmic blows were shaking that closed universe. Trying to raise himself, he felt under his hands the porous, wrinkled wood. A childish voice was crying, "North! Oh! North! Don't you hear me? Let me in, let me in!"

North came back to himself, numbed, weak as if he had bled to death. For a little, he thought himself in the wrecked starship, out in the Pleiades. He hoisted himself up on his elbows and crawled toward the door. He had strength enough left to draw the bolt, turn the key, and then he fainted on the sill.

("It was those trips, you know . . .") Jacky looked up at the Spatial Militiamen who were taking their turn opposite him. They were not hard-hearted; they had given him a sandwich and a big quilt. But how much could they understand? "I never knew when North started getting unhappy. Me, I never went on a trip farther away than the coast. Ever since he's been blind, he always seemed to be so calm! I thought he was like me. When I was around him, I felt good, I never wanted to go

anywhere. Sometimes, to try and be the same as him, I'd put a bandage around my eyes, and try to see everything in sounds instead of colors. Sure, the switchboard operator, and the night watchman—not the robot, the other one—they said this was no life for two boys. But North was blind and I was crippled. Who would have wanted us?

. . . The next day was a day of trouble; North pulled an old space-suit out of a pile of scrap iron and began to polish the plates, whistling. He explained to Jacky that he was going to put it at the entrance of the shop. Toward noon, Jacky took a phone message for North: he was told that the board of directors of a famous sanatorium hesitated to accept a boarder mutated to that extent. He accepted their excuses and hung up, silently.

So that was what it was all about: North wanted to get rid of him. He was crazy—it was as if he had gone blind all over again! During a miserable lunch, the idea came to him to put the building's telephone line out of commission; that way, the outer world would leave them alone. But first he wanted to call up Dr. Evers, their family doctor, and the telephone did not respond. Jacky understood that North had got ahead of him.

After that, he made himself small, rolled his carriage behind some crates, and installed himself

on a shelf of the bookcase. It was his favorite hiding place. There were still in the shop some volumes bound in blond leather, almost golden, which smelled of incense or cigars, with yellowing pages and the curious printing of the 20th century. They had quaint pictures, not even animated. Without looking, he stumbled upon the marvelous story of the navigator who sailed the wine-dark sea. The sail was purple, and the hull of sandalwood. Off the mythological coasts, a divine singing arose, inviting the sailors to more distant flights. The reefs were fringed with pearls; the white moon rose high above the fabulous mountains. Ulysses stopped up their ears with wax and tied himself to the mast. But he himself heard the songs of the sirens . . .

"North," the boy asked later, forgetting all caution, "is there such a thing as sirens?"

"What?" asked the blind man, with a start.

"I mean, the sailors in the olden days, they said—"

"Crud," said North. "Those guys went out of their heads, sailing across the oceans. Just think, it took them longer between Crete, a little island, and Ithaca, than it takes us to get to Jupiter. They went short of food, and their ships were walnut shells. And on top of everything else, for months on end they'd see nobody except a few shipmates, as chapped and hairy as

they were. Well, they'd start to go off their rockers, and the first woman pirate was Circe or Calypso to them, and the first cetacean they met was an ocean princess."

"A manatee," said Jacky.

"That's right, a manatee. Have you ever seen one?"

"No."

"Sure, that's right, I don't think there is one in the Zoo. Maybe in the exotic specimens. Take down the fourth book from the left, on the 'Nat. Sciences' shelf. Page seven hundred ninety-two. Got it?"

Jacky found it. It was a big beast with a round head and mustaches, and a thick oily skin. The female was giving suck to a little tar-baby. They all had serious expressions. Jacky was overcome with mad laughter.

"Ridiculous, isn't it?" North asked in an unrecognizable voice, harsh and broken. "To think so many guys have dived into the water, on account of that! I think they must have been sick."

But that evening, he offered Jacky a ticket to the planetarium and a trip to the amusement park. Jacky refused politely; he was content to stay on his shelf. Again he plunged into the volume bound in blond leather, discovering for the first time that life has always been mysterious and that destiny puts on many masks. The isles with the fabulous names flickered past to the rhythm of strophes; the heroes

sailed for the conquest of the Golden Fleece, or perhaps they led a pale well-beloved out of Hades. Some burned their wings in the sun and fell . . .

North walked around cat-footed, closing the shutters, arranging the planetary knick-knacks. He disappeared so quietly that Jacky was not aware of it, and it was only when the boy wanted to ask him for some information about sailing ships that his absence became a concrete fact. Suddenly afraid, Jacky slipped to the floor, and discovered that his carriage had also disappeared. He crawled then, with the aid of his hooks, among the scattered pieces of iron, and it was then that he stumbled over a horrible viscous thing: the wet billfold of the dead spaceman. The five thousand credits were still inside.

After that, his fear had no limit, and Jacky crawled instinctively toward the door, which he found shut; then to the dumb-waiter, where he heard the Foramen chimera, caged, mew pleasantly. "It won't work, old lady," he breathed at it. "They've locked us both up together." He licked a little blood out of the corners of his mouth, and thought hard. He would have to be quick. To be sure, he could hammer on the door, but the street was deserted at night, the normals were all getting ready to watch their telesets, or some other kind of screen—and there was no use

knocking on the walls, the shop was surrounded by empty cellars. And the telephone was dead.

Jacky then did what any imprisoned boy of his age would have done (but from him, it demanded a superhuman effort): he clambered up the curtains, managed to open the window with his hook, and jumped out. He was hurt, falling on the pavement.

... "That damn' kid!" thought North as he opened the door of the garret. "Sirens!"

His hands were trembling. A wave of aromatics, already familiar, came into his night and surrounded him: he had breathed them on other worlds. He understood what was required of him, and he let himself go, abandoned himself to the furious maelstrom of sounds and smells, to the tide of singing and perfumes. His useless, mutilated body lay somewhere out of the way, on a shelf.

"Look at me," said the music. "I am in you, and you are me. They tried in vain to keep you on Earth, with chains of falsehood. You are no longer of Earth, since we live one life together. Yesterday I showed you the abysses I know. Now you show me the stars you have visited: memory by memory, I shall take them. In that way, perhaps, shall we not find the world that calls us? Come. I shall choose a planet, like a pearl."

He saw them again, all of them.

Alpha Spicae, in the constellation of the Virgin, is a frozen globe, whose atmosphere is so rich in water vapor that a rocket sticks in the ground like a needle of frost. Under a distant green sun, this world scintillates like a million-faceted diamond, and its ice-cap spreads toward the equator. On the ground, you are snared in a net of rainbows and green snow, a snow that smells like benzoin (all the pilots know that stellar illusion). On Alpha Spicae, in a few hours, a lost explorer goes mad.

North was irresistibly drawn away, and shortly recognized the magnetic planet of the Ditch in Cygnus. That one, too, he had learned to avoid on his voyages: it was followed in its orbit by the thousands of sidereal corpses it had captured. The bravest pilots followed it in their coffins of sparkling ice; for that sphere, no larger than the Moon, is composed of pure golden ore.

They passed like a waterspout across a lake of incandescent crystal—Altair. Another trap lay in wait for them in the constellation Orion, where the gigantic diamond of Betelgeuse flashed: a phantasmagoria of deceptive images, a spiderweb of lightnings. The orb which cowered behind these mirages had no name, only a nickname: Sundew. Space pilots avoided it like the Pit.

"Higher!" sang the voice, made up now of thousands of etheric

currents, millions of astral vibrations. "Farther!"

But here, North struggled. He knew now where she was drawing him, and what incandescent hell he would meet on that path, because he had already experienced it. He knew of a peculiar planet with silvery-violet skies, out in the mysterious constellation of Cancer. It was the most beautiful he had ever glimpsed, the only one he had loved like a woman, because its oceans reminded him of a pair of eyes. Ten dancing moons crowned that Alpha Hydrae, which the ancient nomads called Al-Phard. It was a deep watery world, with frothing waves: an odor of sea-salt, of seaweed, of ambergris drifted over its surface. A perpetual ultrasonic music jumbled all attempts at communication, and baffled the starships. The oxygen content of Alpha Hydrae's atmosphere was so high that it intoxicated living beings, and burned them up. The rockets which succeeded in escaping the attraction of Al-Phard carried back crews of the blissful dead.

It was in trying to escape its grip that an uncontrolled machine, with North aboard, had once headed toward the Pleiades and crashed on an asteroid.

Heavy blows shook the temples of the solitary navigator. The enormous sun of Pollux leaped out of space, exploded, fell to ruin in the darkness, with Procyon and the

Goat; the whole Milky Way trembled and vibrated. The human soul lost in that torrent of energy, the soul that struggled, despaired, foundered, was only an infinitesimal atom, a sound—or the echo of a sound, in the harmony of the spheres.

"This is it," said Jacky, wiping his bloody mouth. "Honest, this is it, inspector. There's the window I jumped out of . . ."

There it was, with its smashed glass, and Jacky did not mention how painful the fall had been. His forearms slashed, he had hung suspended by his hooks. On the pavement, he had lost consciousness. Coming to later, under a fine drizzle of rain, he had, he said, "crawled and crawled." Few of the passing autos had even slowed down for that crushed human caterpillar. "Oh, Marilyn, did you see that funny little round-bottom?" —"It must be one of those mutant cripples, don't stop, Galla . . ." —"Space! Are they still contagious?" Jacky bit his lips.

Finally, a truck had stopped. Robots—a crew of robots from the highway commission—had picked him up. He began to cry, seeing himself already thrown onto the junk-heap. By chance, the driver was human; he heard, and took him to the militia post.

"I don't hear anything," said the inspector after a moment of silence.



"The others in the block didn't hear anything either!" breathed Jacky. "I think he must be very unhappy, or else drunk . . . Are there ultrasonics, maybe? Look, the dogs are restless."

Certainly, the handsome Great Danes of the Special Service were acting strangely: they were padding around in circles and whining.

"A quarrel between monsters," thought Inspector Morel. "Just my luck: a mutant stump of a kid, a space pilot with the D.T.'s, and a siren! They'll laugh in my face down at headquarters!"

But, as Jacky cried and beat on the door, he gave the order to break it in. The boy crawled toward the dumb-waiter; one of the militiamen almost fired on the chimera, which leaped from its cabinet, purring.

"That's nothing, it's only a big cat from Foramen!" Jacky wailed. "Come on, please come on, I'm going up the shaft."

"I was never in such a mad-house before," thought the inspector. There were things in every corner—robots or idols, with three heads or seven hands. There were talking shells. One of the men shouted, feeling a mobile creeper twine itself in his hair. They ought to forbid the import of these parlor tricks into an honest Terrestrial port. Not surprising that the lad upstairs should have gone off his nut, the inspector told himself.

When the militia reached the topmost landing of the building, Jacky was stretched out in front of the closed door, banging it desperately with his fists. Whether on account of ultrasonics or not, the men were pale. The enormous harmony which filled the garret was here perceptible, palpable.

Morel called, but no one answered.

"He's dead?" asked Jacky. "Isn't he?"

They sensed a living, evil presence inside.

Morel disposed his men in pairs, one on either side of the door. A ferret-faced little locksmith slipped up and began to work on the bolt. When he was finished, the militiamen were supposed to break the door down quickly and rush inside, while Morel covered them, with heat gun in hand. But it was black inside the garret; someone would have to carry a powerful flashlight and play it back and forth.

"Me," said Jacky. He was white as a sheet, trembling all over. "If my brother's dead, inspector, you should let me go in. Anyhow, what risk would I take? You'll be right behind me. And I promise not to let go of the flashlight, no matter what."

The inspector looked at the legless child. "You might get yourself shot," he said. "You never know what weapons these extra-terrestrials are going to use. Or what they're thinking, or what they

want. That thing . . . maybe it sings the way we breathe."

"I know," said Jacky. He neglected to add, "That's why I asked to carry the flashlight. So as to get to it first."

The inspector handed him the flashlight. He seized it firmly with one of his hooks. And the first sharp ray, like a sword, cut through the keyhole into the attic.

They all felt the crushing tension let go. Released, with frothing tongues, the dogs lay down on the floor. It was as if a tight cord had suddenly snapped. And abruptly, behind the closed door, something broke with a stunning crash. Something fell with a dull sound to the floor.

At the same instant, there was a great crash, and the landing was flooded with an intolerable smell of burned flesh. Down in the street, passers-by screamed and ran like ants. The building was burning. An object falling in flames had buried itself in the roof. . . .

The militamen broke down the door, and Morel stumbled over a horrible mass of flesh, calcined, crushed, which no longer bore any resemblance to North. A man who had fallen from a starship, across the stellar void, might have looked like that. A man who had leaped into vacuum without a spacesuit . . . a half-disintegrated manikin. North Ellis, the blind pilot, had suffered his last shipwreck.

Overcome by nausea, the militamen backed away. Jacky himself had not moved from the landing. He clung to the flashlight, and the powerful beam of light implacable searched, swept the dark cave. The symphony which only his ears had heard plainly grew fainter, then lost itself in a tempest of discordant sounds. The invisible being gave one last sharp wail (in the street, all the windows broke and the lights went out).

Then there was silence.

Jacky sat and licked his bloody lips. Inside, in the garret, the militamen were pulling down the black drapes, breaking furniture. One of them shouted, "There's nothing here!"

Jacky dropped the flashlight, raised himself on his stumps. "Look in the chest! In the strong room, to the side—"

"Nothing in here. Nothing in the chest."

"Wait a minute," said the youngest of the militamen, "there it is—on the floor."

When they dragged her out, her round head bobbed, and Jacky recognized the thick glossy skin and the flippers. She had died, probably, at the first touch of the light, but her corpse was still pulsing in a heavy rhythm. An ultrasonic machine? No. Two red slits wept bloody tears. . . . The sirens of Alpha Hydrac cannot bear the light.

*The following three pages are given over to a dream-like sort of escape reading for artists of all kinds, everywhere . . .*

# bug-getter

*by R. Bretnor*

AMBROSIUS GOSHAWK WAS A starving artist. He couldn't afford to starve decently in a garret in Montmartre or Greenwich Village. He lived in a cold, smoke-stained flat in downtown Pittsburgh, a flat furnished with enormously hairy overstuffed objects which always seemed moist, and filled with unsalable paintings. The paintings were all in a style strongly reminiscent of Rembrandt, but with far more than his technical competence. They were absurdly representational.

Goshawk's wife had abandoned him, moving in with a dealer who merchandized thousands of Klee and Mondrian reproductions at \$1.98 each. Her note had been scrawled on the back of a nasty demand from his dentist's collection agency. Two shoddy subpoenas lay on the floor next to his landlord's eviction notice. In this litter, unshaven and haggard, sat Ambrosius Goshawk. His left hand held a newspaper clipping, a disquisition on his work by one J. Herman Lort, the nation's fore-

most authority on Art. His right hand held a palette-knife with which he was desperately scraping little green crickets from the unfinished painting on his easel, a nude for which Mrs. Goshawk had posed.

The apartment was full of little green crickets. So, for that matter, was the Eastern half of the country. But Ambrosius Goshawk was not concerned with them as a plague. They were simply an intensely personal, utterly shattering Last Straw—and, as he scraped, he was thinking the strongest thoughts he had ever thought.

He had been thinking them for some hours, and they had, of course, travelled far out into the inhabited Universe. That was why, at three minutes past two in the afternoon, there was a whirr at the window, a click as it was pushed open from the outside, and a thud as a small bucket-shaped spaceship landed on the unpaid-for carpet. A hatch opened, and a gnarled, undersized being stepped out.

"Well," he said, with what might have been a slightly curdled Bulgarian accent, "here I am."

Ambrosius Goshawk flipped a cricket over his shoulder, glared, and said decisively, "No, I will *not* take you to my leader." Then he started working on another cricket who had his feet stuck on a particularly intimate part of Mrs. Goshawk's anatomy.

"I am not interested with your leader," replied the being, unstrapping something that looked like a super-gadgety spray-gun. "You have thought for me, because you are wanting an extermination. I am the Exterminator. Johnny-with-the-spot, that is me. Pronounce me your troubles."

Ambrosius Goshawk put down his palette-knife. "What won't I think of next?" he exclaimed. "Little man, because of the manner of your arrival, your alleged business, and my state of mind, I will take you quite seriously. Seat yourself."

Then, starting with his failure to get a scholarship back in art school he worked down through his landlord, his dentist, his wife, to the clipping by J. Herman Lort, from which he read at some length, coming finally to the following passage:

". . . and it is in the work of these pseudo-creative people, of self-styled 'artists' like Ambrosius Goshawk, whose clumsily crafted imitations of photography must be a thorn in the flesh of every truly

sensitive and creative critical mind that the perceptive collector will realize the deeply-researched validity of the doctrine I have explained in my book *The Creative Critical Intellect*—that true Art can be 'created' only by such an intellect when adequately trained in an appropriately staffed institution, 'created' needless to say out of the vast treasury of natural and accidental-type forms—out of driftwood and bird-droppings, out of torn-up roots and cracked rocks—and that all the rest is a snare and a delusion, nay! an outright fraud."

Ambrosius Goshawk threw the clipping down. "You'd think," he cried out, "that mortal man could stand no more. And now—" he pointed at the invading insects—"*now there's this!*"

"So," asked the being, "what is this?"

Ambrosius Goshawk took a deep breath, counted to seven, and screamed, "*CRICKETS!*" hysterically.

"It is simple," said the being. "I will exterminate. My fee—"

"Fee?" Goshawk interrupted him bitterly. "How can I pay a fee?"

"My fee will be paintings. Six you will give. In advance. Then I exterminate. After, it is one dozen more."

Goshawk decided that other worlds must have wealthy eccentrics, but he made no demur. He

watched while the Exterminator put six paintings aboard, and he waved a dizzy goodbye as the spaceship took off. Then he went back to prying the crickets off Mrs. Goshawk.

The Exterminator returned two years later. However, his spaceship did not have to come in through the window. It simply sailed down past the towers of Ambrosius Goshawk's Florida castle into a fountained courtyard patterned after somewhat simpler ones in the Taj Mahal, and landed among a score of young women whose figures and costumes suggested a handsomely modernized Musselman heaven. Some were splashing raw in the fountains. Some were lounging around Goshawk's easel, hoping he might try to seduce them. Two were standing by with swatters, alert for the little green crickets which occasionally happened along.

The Exterminator did not notice Goshawk's curt nod. "How hard to have find you," he chuckled, "ha-ha! Half-miles from north, I see some big palaces, ha, so! all marbles. From the south, even bigger, one Japanese castles. Who has built?"

Goshawk rudely replied that the palaces belonged to several com-

posers, sculptors, and writers, that the Japanese castle was the whim of an elderly poetess, and that the Exterminator would have to excuse him because he was busy.

The Exterminator paid no attention. "See how has changing, your world," he exclaimed, rubbing his hands. "All artists have many success. With yachts, with Rolls-Royces, with minks, diamonds, many round ladies. Now I take twelve more paintings."

"Beat it," snarled Goshawk. "You'll get no more paintings from me!"

The Exterminator was taken aback. "You are having not happy?" he asked. "You have not liking all this? I have done job like my promise. You must paying one dozens more picture."

A cricket hopped onto the nude on which Goshawk was working. He threw his brush to the ground. "I'll pay you nothing!" he shouted. "Why, you fake, you did nothing at all! Any good artist can succeed nowadays, but it's no thanks to you! Look at 'em—there are as many of these damned crickets as ever!"

The Exterminator's jaw dropped in astonishment. For a moment, he goggled at Goshawk.

Then, "Crickets?" he croaked. "My God! I have thought you said critics!"





*Every writer has been asked: "But where do you get your crazy ideas?" Not all writers are scientists, however, and in all likelihood not as well equipped as is our Good Doctor to make a wild guess at an answer . . . .*

## THOSE CRAZY IDEAS

*by Isaac Asimov*

TIME AND TIME AGAIN I (AND I'm sure most s.f. writers) have been asked: "Where do you get your crazy ideas?" Over the years, my answers have sunk from flattered confusion to biting profanity, the truth being that I didn't know and didn't care, as long as they kept coming.

Eventually, I let the question inspire a story, "Dreaming Is a Private Thing" (F&SF, December 1955) and a piece of doggerel verse, "I Just Make Them Up, Seel" (F&SF, February 1958), the latter title being, as the perceptive reader will have noticed, an answer (of sorts) to the question.

That would be an end to it really, except that a couple of months ago, a consultant firm in

Boston, engaged in a sophisticated space-age project for the government, got in touch with me.

It seemed that what they needed to bring their project to a successful conclusion were novel suggestions, startling new principles, conceptual breakthroughs. To put it into the nutshell of a well-turned phrase, they needed "crazy ideas."

Unfortunately, they didn't know how to go about getting crazy ideas, but some among them were s.f. readers, so they looked me up in the phone book and what they asked (in essence) was, "Dr. Asimov, where do your get your crazy ideas?"

Alas, I still didn't know, but as a result of that call I have done some thinking about the problem

of creativity, and about scientific creativity in particular.

I don't believe anyone (including myself) knows just what it is that makes for creativity, or what happens in the mind that results in creativity. However, since speculation is my profession and since the kindly editor gives my speculative powers free rein (in a nervous sort of way), I intend to discuss said mental processes, just as if I understood them.

The question before the house, then, is: How does one go about creating or inventing or dreaming up or stumbling over a new and revolutionary scientific principle?

For instance, how did Darwin come to think of evolution?

To begin with, in 1831, Charles Darwin, age 22, joined the crew of a ship called the *Beagle*. This ship was making a five-year voyage about the world to explore various coast lines and to increase man's geographical knowledge. Darwin went along as ship's naturalist to study the forms of life in far-off places.

This he did extensively and well, and upon the return of the *Beagle*, Darwin wrote a book about his experiences (published in 1840) which made him famous. In the course of this voyage, numerous observations led him to the conclusion that species of living creatures changed and developed slowly with time; that

new species descended from old. This, in itself was not a new idea. Ancient Greeks had had glimmerings of evolutionary notions. Many scientists before Darwin, including Darwin's own grandfather, had had theories of evolution.

However, no scientist had been able to evolve an explanation for the *why* of evolution. A French naturalist, Jean Baptiste Lamarck, had suggested in the early 1800's that it came about by a kind of conscious effort or inner drive. A tree-grazing animal, attempting to reach leaves, stretched its neck over the years and transmitted a longer neck to its descendants. The process was repeated with each generation until a giraffe was formed.

The flaw, of course, was that acquired characteristics are not inherited and this was easily proved. The Lamarckian explanation did not carry conviction.

Charles Darwin, however, had nothing better to suggest after several years of thinking about the problem.

But in 1798, eleven years before Darwin's birth, an English clergyman named Thomas Robert Malthus, had written a book entitled *An Essay on the Principle of Population*. In this book, Malthus suggested that the human population always increased faster than the food supply and that the population must be cut down by

starvation, disease or war; that these evils were therefore unavoidable.

In 1838, Darwin, still puzzling over the problem of the development of species, read Malthus' book, and instantly everything was clear to him. Not only human beings increased faster than the food supply; all species of living things did. In every case, the surplus population had to be cut down by starvation, by predators or by disease. Now no two members of any species are exactly alike; each has slight individual variations from the "norm." Accepting this fact, which part of the population was cut down?

Why—and this was Darwin's breakthrough—those members of the species who were less efficient in the race for food, less adept at fighting off or escaping from predators, less equipped to resist disease, went down.

The survivors, generation after generation, were better adapted, on the average, to their environment. The slow changes toward a better fit with the environment accumulated until a new (and better adapted) species had replaced the old. Darwin thus postulated the reason for evolution as being the action of *natural selection*. In fact, the full title of his book is *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*. We just call it

*The Origin of Species* and miss the full flavor of what it was he did.

It was in 1838 that Darwin received this flash and in 1844 that he began writing his book, but he worked on for fourteen years gathering evidence to back up his thesis. He was a methodical perfectionist and no amount of evidence seemed to satisfy him. He always wanted more. His friends read his preliminary manuscripts and urged him to publish. In particular, Charles Lyell (whose book *Principles of Geology*, published in 1830-1833, first convinced scientists of the great age of the earth and thus first showed there had been *time* for the slow progress of evolution to take place) warned Darwin that someone would beat him to the punch.

While Darwin was working, another and younger English naturalist, Alfred Russel Wallace, was travelling in distant lands. He, too, found copious evidence to show that evolution took place and he, too, wanted to find a reason. He did not know that Darwin had already solved the problem.

He spent three years, puzzling, and then in 1858, he, too, came across Malthus' book and read it, and he too instantly saw the answer. Unlike Darwin, however, he did not settle down to fourteen years of gathering and arranging evidence. Instead, he grabbed pen and paper and at once wrote up his theory. He finished in two days.



Naturally, he didn't want to rush into print without having his notions checked by competent colleagues, so he decided to send it to some well-known naturalist. To whom? Why, to Charles Darwin. To whom else?

I have often tried to picture Darwin's feelings as he read Wallace's essay which, he afterward stated, expressed the matter in almost his own words. He wrote to Lyell that he had been forestalled "with a vengeance."

Darwin, a man of the highest integrity, made no attempt to suppress Wallace. On the contrary, he passed on the essay to others and arranged to have it published along with a similar essay of his own. A year later Darwin published his book.

Now the reason I chose this case was that here we have two men making one of the greatest discoveries in the history of science independently and simultaneously and under precisely the same stimulus. Does that mean *anyone* could have worked out the theory of natural selection if they had made a sea-voyage and combined that with reading Malthus?

Well, let's see. Here's where the speculation starts.

To begin with, both Darwin and Wallace were thoroughly grounded in natural history. Each had accumulated a vast collection of facts in the field in which they

were to make their breakthrough. Surely this is significant.

Now every man in his lifetime collects facts, individual pieces of data, items of information—let's call them "bits" (as they do, I think, in information theory). The "bits" can be of all varieties: personal memories, girls' phone numbers, baseball players' batting averages, yesterday's weather, the atomic weights of the chemical elements.

Naturally, different men gather different numbers of different varieties of "bits." A person who has collected a larger number than usual of those varieties that are held to be particularly difficult to obtain—say, those involving the sciences and the liberal arts—is considered "educated."

There are two broad ways in which the "bits" can be accumulated. The more common way, nowadays, is to find people who already possess many "bits" and have them transfer those "bits" to your mind in good order and in predigested fashion. Our schools specialize in this transfer of "bits" and those of us who take advantage of them receive a "formal education."

The less common way is to collect "bits" with a minimum amount of live help. They can be obtained from books or out of personal experience. In that case you are "self-educated."

It often happens that "self-edu-

cated" is confused with "uneducated." This is an error to be avoided. Scientific breakthroughs have been initiated by those who were formally educated, as for instance by Nicolas Copernicus, and by those who were self-educated, as for instance by Michael Faraday.

To be sure, the structure of science has grown more complex over the years and the absorption of the necessary number of "bits" has become more and more difficult without the guidance of someone who has already absorbed them. The self-educated genius is therefore becoming rarer, though he has still not vanished.

However, without drawing any distinction referring to the manner in which "bits" have been accumulated, let's set up the first criterion for scientific creativity:

1) The creative person must possess as many "bits" of information as possible; *i.e.* he must be educated.

Of course, the accumulation of "bits" is not enough in itself. We have probably all met people who are intensely educated, but who manage nevertheless to be abysmally stupid. They have the "bits," but the "bits" just lie there.

But what is there one can do with "bits?"

Well, one can combine them into groups of two or more. Everyone does that; it is the principle of

the string on the finger. You tell yourself to remember *a* (to buy bread) when you observe *b* (the string). You enforce a combination that will not let you forget *a* because *b* is so noticeable.

That, of course, is a conscious and artificial combination of "bits." It is my feeling that every mind is, more or less unconsciously, continually making all sorts of combinations and permutations of "bits," probably at random.

Some minds do this with greater facility than do others; some minds have greater capacity for dredging the combinations out of the unconscious and becoming consciously aware of them. This results in "new ideas."

The ability to combine "bits" easily and skillfully, and to grow consciously aware of the new combinations is, I would like to suggest, the measure of what we call "intelligence." In this view, it is quite possible to be educated and yet not intelligent.

Obviously, the creative scientist must not only have his "bits" on hand but he must be able to combine them readily and more or less consciously. Darwin not only observed data, he also made deductions—clever and far-reaching deductions—from what he observed. That is, he combined the "bits" in interesting ways and drew important conclusions.

So the second criterion of creativity is:

2) The creative person must be able to combine "bits" easily and skillfully, and recognize the combinations he has formed; *i.e.* he must be intelligent.

Even forming and recognizing new combinations is insufficient in itself. Some combinations are important and some are trivial, and there is no question but that a person who cannot tell which are which must labor under a terrible disadvantage. As he plods after each possible new idea, he loses time and his life passes uselessly.

There is also no question but that there are people who somehow have the gift of seeing the consequences "in a flash" as Darwin and Wallace did; of feeling what the end must be without consciously going through every step of the reasoning. This, I suggest, is the measure of what we call "intuition."

Intuition plays more of a role in some branches of scientific knowledge than others. Mathematics, for instance, is a deductive science in which, once certain basic principles are learned, large number of items of information become "obvious" as consequences of those principles. Most of us, to be sure, lack the intuitive powers to see the "obvious."

To truly intuitive minds, however, the combination of the few necessary "bits" is at once extraordinarily rich in consequences.

Without too much trouble, they see them all, including some that have not been seen by their predecessors.<sup>1</sup>

It is perhaps for this reason that mathematics and mathematical physics have seen repeated cases of first-rank breakthroughs by youngsters. Evariste Galois evolved group theory at 21. Isaac Newton worked out calculus at 23. Albert Einstein presented the theory of relativity at 26, and so on.

In those branches of science which are now inductive and require larger numbers of "bits" to begin with, the average age of the scientists at the time of the breakthrough is greater. Darwin was 29 at the time of his flash, Wallace was 35.

But in any science, however inductive, intuition is necessary for creativity. So:

3) The creative person must be able to see, with as little delay as possible, the consequences of the new combinations of "bits" which he has formed; *i.e.* he must be intuitive.

But now let's look at this business of combining "bits" in a little more detail. "Bits" are at varying distances from each other. The

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<sup>1</sup> *The Swiss mathematician, Leonhard Euler, said that to the true mathematician, it is at once obvious that  $e\pi = -1$ . This, alas, is not obvious to me.*

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more closely related two "bits" are, the more apt one is to be reminded of one by the other and to make the combination. Consequently, a new idea that arises from such a combination is made quickly. It is a "natural consequence" of an older idea, a "corollary." It "obviously follows."

The combination of less related "bits" results in a more startling idea; if for no other reason than that it takes longer for such a combination to be made, so that the new idea is therefore less "obvious." For a scientific breakthrough of the first rank, there must be a combination of "bits" so widely spaced that the random chance of the combination being made is small indeed. (Otherwise, it will be made quickly and be considered but a corollary of some previous idea, or "breakthrough.")

But it can easily happen that two "bits" sufficiently widely spaced to make a breakthrough by their combination are not present in the same mind. Neither Darwin nor Wallace, for all their education, intelligence, and intuition, possessed the key "bits" necessary to work out the theory of evolution by natural selection. Those "bits" were lying in Malthus' book, and both Darwin and Wallace had to find them there.

To do this, however, they had to read, understand, and appreciate the book. In short, they had to be ready to incorporate other peo-

ple's "bits" and treat them with all the ease with which they treated their own.

It would hamper creativity, in other words, to emphasize intensity of education at the expense of broadness. It is bad enough to limit the nature of the "bits" to the point where the necessary two would not be in the same mind. It would be fatal to mold a mind to the point where it was incapable of accepting "foreign bits."

I think, then, that we ought to revise the first criterion of creativity to read:

1) The creative person must possess as many "bits" as possible, falling into as wide a variety of types as possible; *i.e.*, he must be broadly educated.

As the total amount of "bits" to be accumulated increases with the advance of science, it is becoming more and more difficult to gather enough "bits" in a wide enough area. Therefore, the practice of "brain-busting" is coming into popularity; the notion of collecting thinkers into groups and hoping that they will cross-fertilize one another into startling new breakthroughs.

Under what circumstances could this conceivably work? (After all, anything that will stimulate creativity is of first importance to humanity.)

Well, to begin with, a group of people will have more "bits" on hand than any member of the

group singly, since each man is likely to have some "bits" the others do not possess.

However, the increase in "bits" is not in direct proportion to the number of men, because there is bound to be considerable overlapping. As the group increases, the smaller and smaller addition of completely new "bits" introduced by each additional member is quickly outweighed by the added tensions involved in greater numbers; the longer waiting to speak, the greater likelihood of being interrupted, and so on. It is my (intuitive) guess that five is as large a number as one can stand in such a conference.

Now of the three criteria mentioned so far, I feel (intuitively) that intuition is the least common. It is more likely that none of the group will be intuitive than that none will be intelligent or none educated. If no individual in the group is intuitive, the group as a whole will not be intuitive. You cannot pile up non-intuition into intuition.

If one of the group is intuitive, he is almost certain to be intelligent and educated as well, or he would not have been asked to join the group in the first place. In short, for a brain-busting group to be creative, it must be quite small and it must possess at least one creative individual. But in that case, does that one individual need the group? Let's see.

Why did Darwin work fourteen years gathering evidence for a theory he himself must have been convinced from the beginning was correct? Why did Wallace send his manuscript to Darwin first instead of offering it for publication at once?

To me it seems that they must have realized that any new idea is met by resistance from the general population who, after all, are not creative. The more radical the new idea, the greater the dislike and distrust it arouses. The dislike and distrust aroused by a first-class breakthrough are so great that the author must be prepared for unpleasant consequences (sometimes for expulsion from the respect of the scientific community; sometimes, in some societies, for death).

Darwin was trying to gather enough evidence to protect himself by convincing others through a sheer flood of reasoning. Wallace wanted to have Darwin on his side before proceeding.

It takes courage to announce the results of your creativity. The greater the creativity, the greater the necessary courage in much more than direct proportion. After all, consider that the more profound the breakthrough, the more solidified the previous opinions; the more "against reason" the new discovery seems; the more against cherished authority.

Usually, a man who possesses

enough courage to be a scientific genius seems odd. After all, a man who has sufficient courage or irreverence to fly in the face of reason or authority *must* be odd, if you define "odd" as "being not like most people." And if he is courageous and irreverent in such a colossally big thing, he will certainly be courageous and irreverent in many small things, so that being odd in one way, he is apt to be odd in others. In short, he will seem to the non-creative, conforming people about him to be a "crackpot."

So we have the fourth criterion:

4) The creative person must possess courage (and, in consequence, to the general public may seem a crackpot).

As it happens, it is the crackpottery that is often most noticeable about the creative individual. The eccentric and absent-minded professor is a stock character in fiction; and in science-fiction, particularly. We all know the importance of the "mad scientist" in the early history of the craft.

(And be it noted that we s.f. writers are never asked where we get our interesting or effective or clever or fascinating ideas. We are invariably asked where we get our *crazy* ideas.)

Of course, the fact that the creative individual is usually an apparent crackpot does not mean that every crackpot is automati-

cally a genius. The chances are low indeed and failure to recognize that the proposition cannot be so reversed is the cause of a great deal of trouble.

If we assume that combinations of "bits" take place quite at random in the unconscious mind, it follows that it is quite possible that a person may possess in superabundance all four of the criteria I have mentioned and yet may never make the necessary combination. If Darwin had never read Malthus, would he ever have thought of natural selection? What made him pick up the copy? What if someone had interrupted him?

So there is a fifth criterion which I am at a loss to phrase in any other way than this:

5) A creative person must be lucky.

To summarize:

A creative person must be 1) broadly educated, 2) intelligent, 3) intuitive, 4) courageous, and 5) lucky.

Now, more than ever before in man's history, we must encourage creativity—and the need will grow constantly in the future. How do we go about it?

Only, it seems to me, by increasing the incidence of the various criteria among the general population.

Of the five criteria, number 5

(luck) is out of our hands. We can only hope; although we must also remember Louis Pasteur's famous statement, "Luck favors the prepared mind." Presumably, if we have enough of the other four criteria, we shall find enough of number five as well.

Criteria 1 (broad education) is in the hands of our school system. Many educators are working hard to find ways of increasing the quality of education among the public. They should be encouraged to continue doing so.

Criteria 2 (intelligence) and 3 (intuition) are inborn and their incidence cannot be increased (as far as we now know). However, they can be more efficiently recognized and utilized. I would like to see methods devised for spotting the intelligent and intuitive (particularly the latter) early in life and treating them with special care. This, too, is a vital concern of educators.

To me, though, it seems that criterion 4 (courage) receives the least attention, and at the same time it is the one we should be able to do the most about. Perhaps it is difficult to make a person more courageous than he is, but that is not necessary. It would

be equally effective to reduce the need for courage—to adopt an attitude that creativity is a permissible activity.

Does this mean changing society, or human nature? Perhaps not. Perhaps there are short-cut methods.

Suppose we have a group of five that includes one creative individual. What can that individual receive from the non-creative four?

The answer to me, seems to be just this: Permission!

They must permit him to create. They must tell him to go ahead and be a crackpot.

How is this permissiveness to be achieved? Can four essentially non-creative people find it within themselves to give such permission? Can the one creative person find it within himself to accept such permission?

I don't know. I believe, however, that this is an area where we urgently need experimentation and some kind of creative breakthrough in the study of creativity. Apart from other and probably more important advantages of such a breakthrough, I might finally learn where I get all those crazy ideas.





## AND THE TRUTH SHALL DRIVE YOU MAD

by Damon Knight

THERE IS A CONVENTION IN recent fiction that people and events are comprehensible and can be reduced to diagrams. Thus, as a rule, every major character in a modern novel sooner or later—usually sooner than later—gets off in a corner with some other character and starts pulling drawers out of himself like a bureau. This goes on until the reader feels perfectly satisfied that the character is fully exposed and predictable; and then the story can proceed in an orderly way—character A is a knight, and moves two squares in a straight line, one square diagonally; character B is a bishop, and moves any number

of squares diagonally; and so on.

Looked at in this way, every story is basically a game, and can be discussed in terms of strategy and alliance.

But to Shirley Jackson, people are enigmas, and the things that happen to them are essentially inexplicable. So her stories don't and can't follow the rules; and in fact it seems to me that even using the term "novel" to describe her newest book, *THE HAUNTING OF HILL HOUSE* (Viking, \$3.95), is stretching the word too far.

Although this is certainly a ghost story in one way or another, it does not follow the ghost-story pattern, and its dominant note is



not terror, but a faintly disturbing sense of strangeness. Certain rooms in Hill House are described as distressingly wrong in their dimensions (like the room built by the N.I.C.E. for the corruption of souls, in C. S. Lewis's *THAT HIDEOUS STRENGTH*); and yet this is curiously unimpressive, whereas the kitchen, a large, bright room which merely happens to have three doors opening onto the veranda, has an inarguable sense of something wrong about it.

"No live organism," the book begins, "can continue for long to exist sanely under conditions of absolute reality; even larks and katydids are supposed, by some, to dream. Hill House, not sane, stood by itself against its hills, holding darkness within; it had stood so for eighty years and might stand for eighty more. Within, walls continued upright, bricks met neatly, floors were firm, and doors were sensibly shut; silence lay steadily against the wood and stone of Hill House, and whatever walked there, walked alone."

Whether or not the house is haunted (and if so, by whom) never seems to be the central issue. Dr. Montague, the investigator who brings the other three main characters to Hill House, does little except try to measure the curious "cold spot" outside the nursery door. His more energetic

wife, who turns up later in the company of a bean-brained headmaster, is a comic character, full of esoteric misinformation. ("You have no idea the messages I've gotten from nuns walled up alive.") The narrative drifts slowly and rather pleasantly, like a very long short story, toward its resolution as one of the characters sinks gently and rather pleasantly into madness.

Not one of the characters unbosoms himself, or ever becomes quite predictable; at the end of the book they are all, if anything, more remote and mysterious than ever. The question of Hill House is answered (if it is answered at all) only obliquely.

What remains is Shirley Jackson's unique sense of the pervasiveness of evil: the intolerable reality that surrounds all our dream-worlds of lath and plaster.

When two writers collaborate, usually one writes a first draft, and the other corrects and rewrites it. The Dickson-Anderson "Hoka" stories were written this way, and so were the joint efforts of L. Sprague de Camp and Fletcher Pratt.

Frederik Pohl and Cyril Kornbluth had a different method, one which involved a single draft and produced novels in jig time: the hot typewriter system. After plotting the story together, they would divide the outline into

short sections. One collaborator would sit down at the typewriter and do section 1; when he was finished, he'd go downstairs, drink some coffee, read a newspaper, while the other man went up and wrote section 2; and so on.

This system has evident virtues, together with some defects. For instance, as in *WOLFBANE*, by Pohl and Kornbluth (Ballantine, 35¢), you may get a brilliant analysis of the Oriental life pattern, developed and projected onto a future civilization on this continent (1,500 calories a day: slouching gait, politeness, minuscule sub-arts—Water Watching, Clouds and Odors, Sky-Viewing . . . people named Tropile and Boyne, in towns called Wheeling, Altoona and Gary, walking through an elaborate life-long ritual, purely and simply because their diet permits nothing better) and then when you are not looking the other man sits down at the typewriter, and you get an incredibly obtuse blurt like this: "as children account for gifts at Ecksmass with Kringle-San."

Nevertheless, *WOLFBANE*, which appeared in a shorter form as a two-part serial in *Galaxy*, is one of the most entertaining jobs Pohl and Kornbluth did together. For breadth of conception, for the intellectual brilliance with which it ranges over Zen Buddhism, higher mathematics, machine shop practice, &c., &c.; for occasional

fruitful ironies (e. g., the robots who wire people into the circuits of their computers); and above all for the unsentimental clarity with which it views mankind, the novel is a rewarding experience.

Robert Sheckley's *IMMORTALITY, INC.* (Bantam, 35¢) concerns a young junior yacht designer named Thomas Blaine, who is killed in an auto accident and wakes up in the year 2110, having been revived in another body as an advertising stunt. The hero is more solidly drawn than most of Sheckley's protagonists, and the early part of the story is satiric and funny. But this is Sheckley's first novel, a long way from the five-thousand-word length in which he has done most of his work: and the second half of the book trails off into a disorganized scattering of episodes, many of them perfunctorily written.

"As the spaceship vanished into the steamy mists of Eristan II, Trevor Jamieson drew his gun. He felt dizzy, sickened by the way he had been tossed and buffeted for long moments in the furious wind stream of the great ship. But awareness of danger held him tense there in the harness that was attached by cables to the anti-gravity plate above him. With narrowed eyes, he stared up at the ezwal which was peering down at

him over the edge of the still swaying skyraft."

A. E. van Vogt's *THE WAR AGAINST THE RULL* (Simon & Schuster, \$3.50), pieced together with some minor revisions from his *Astounding* stories, "Repetition," "Cooperate Or Else," "The Second Solution," "The Rull," and "The Sound," is at its best in its opening paragraph, quoted in full above. Nobody but van Vogt could pack so much cliff-hanging suspense into so short a space: nobody at all could sustain it over the length of this "novel." The book is written in the author's worst babu English ("Jamieson mentally calculated his time situation"), and except for brief episodes in which the ezvals are involved—van Vogt's "Black Destroyer" in a different form, satanically strong, merciless, proud and beautiful—the story is dull.

Isaac Asimov's *WORDS OF SCIENCE* (Houghton Mifflin, \$5) is a large, beautifully made book explaining the derivations and meanings of scientific terms—alphabetically, one to a page, from Absolute Zero to Zodiac. My only complaint is that there isn't more of it.

In *ONE AGAINST HERCULUM* (an Ace Double, with Andre Norton's *SECRET OF THE LOST RACE*, 35¢), Jerry Sohl has written the most featherbrained s-f novel of the year, unless that honor belongs to *ROBOT HUNT*, by Roger Lee Vernon (Avalon, \$2.95).

The mildly inebriated novels of Leonard Wibberley have many devoted followers, of which I am not one. I couldn't get past p. 84 of *THE QUEST OF EXCALIBUR* (Putnam, \$3.50), but if you liked previous Wibberleys, go to this one, & bless you.



STATEMENT REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AS AMENDED BY THE ACTS OF MARCH 3, 1938, AND JULY 2, 1946 (Title 39, United States Code, Section 233) SHOWING THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION of The Magazine of *Fantasy and Science Fiction*, published monthly at Concord, New Hampshire, for October 1, 1959.

1. The names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: *Publisher*, Joseph W. Ferman, 527 Madison Avenue, New York 22, N. Y.; *Editor*, Robert P. Mills, 527 Madison Avenue, New York 22, N. Y. 2. The owners are Mercury Press, Inc., 527 Madison Avenue, New York 22, N. Y.; Joseph W. Ferman, 527 Madison Avenue, New York 22, N. Y. 3. The known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 percent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: None. 4. Paragraphs 2 and 3 include, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting; also the statements in the two paragraphs show the affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner. (Signed) Joseph W. Ferman, *Publisher*. Sworn to and subscribed before me this 24th day of September, 1959. (Seal) Melvin Flamm (My commission expires March 30, 1961.)

*Winner of last year's "Hugo" for the best science fiction novelet of the year, Clifford D. Simak is one of the really solid professionals in this field. . . . The present tale, we are most pleased to report, is only the first of a new group of novelets we have on hand from Mr. Simak. It is about a distinguished gentleman who makes a shocking discovery; but is it about himself, or the world around him—or something else altogether?*

## FINAL GENTLEMAN

*by Clifford D. Simak*

AFTER THIRTY YEARS AND SEVERAL million words there finally came a day when he couldn't write a line.

There was nothing more to say. He had said it all.

The book, the last of many of them, had been finished weeks ago and would be published soon and there was an emptiness inside of him, a sense of having been completely drained away.

He sat now at the study window, waiting for the man from the news magazine to come, looking out across the wilderness of lawn, with its evergreens and birches and the gayness of the tulips. And he wondered why he cared that he would write no more, for certainly he had said a great deal more than most men in his trade and most of it more to the point than was usual, and cloaked though it was in fictional

garb, he'd said it with sincerity and, he hoped, convincingly.

His place in literature was secure and solid. And, perhaps, he thought, this was the way it should be—to stop now at the floodtide of his art rather than to go into his declining years with the sharp tooth of senility nibbling away the bright valor of his work.

And yet there remained the urge to write, an inborn feeling that to fail to write was treachery, although to whom it might be traitorous he had no idea. And there was more to it than that: An injured pride, perhaps, and a sense of panic such as the newly blind must feel.

Although that was foolishness, he told himself. In his thirty years of writing, he had done a lifetime's work. And he'd made a good life of it. Not frivolous or exciting, but surely satisfying.

He glanced around the study and thought how a room must bear the imprint of the man who lives within it—the rows of calf-bound books, the decorous neatness of the massive oaken desk, the mellow carpet on the floor, the old chairs full of comfort, the sense of everything firmly and properly in place.

A knock came. "Come in," said Harrington.

The door opened and old Adams stood there, bent shoulders, snow white hair—the perfect picture of the old retainer.

"It's the gentleman from *Situation*, sir."

"Fine," said Harrington. "Will you show him in?"

It wasn't fine—he didn't want to see this man from the magazine. But the arrangements had been made many weeks before and there was nothing now but to go through with it.

The man from the magazine looked more like a businessman than a writer, and Harrington caught himself wondering how such a man could write the curt, penetrating journalistic prose which had made *Situation* famous.

"John Leonard, sir," said the man, shaking hands with Harrington.

"I'm glad to have you here," said Harrington, falling into his pat pattern of hospitality. "Won't you take this chair? I feel I know

you people down there. I've read your magazine for years. I always read the Harvey column immediately it arrives."

Leonard laughed a little. "Harvey," he said, "seems to be our best known columnist and greatest attraction. All the visitors want to have a look at him."

He sat down in the chair Harrington had pointed out.

"Mr. White," he said, "sends you his best wishes."

"That is considerate of him," said Harrington. "You must thank him for me. It's been years since I have seen him."

And thinking back upon it, he recalled that he'd met Preston White only once, all of twenty years ago. The man, he remembered, had made a great impression upon him at the time—a forceful, driving, opinionated man, an exact reflection of the magazine he published.

"A few weeks ago," said Leonard, "I talked with another friend of yours. Senator Johnson Enright."

Harrington nodded. "I've known the senator for years and have admired him greatly. I suppose you could call it a dissimilar association. The senator and I are not too much alike."

"He has a deep respect and affection for you."

"And I for him," said Harrington. "But this secretary of state business. I am concerned . . ."

"Yes?"

"Oh, he's the man for it, all right," said Harrington. "or I would suppose he is. He is intellectually honest and he has a strange, hard streak of stubbornness and a rugged constitution, which is what we need. But there are considerations . . ."

Leonard showed surprise. "Surely you do not . . ."

Harrington waved a weary hand. "No, Mr. Leonard, I am looking at it solely from the viewpoint of a man who has given most of his life to the public service. I know that Johnson must look upon this possibility with something close to dread. There have been times in the recent past when he's been ready to retire, when only his sense of duty has kept him at his post."

"A man," said Leonard positively, "does not turn down a chance to head the state department. Besides, Harvey said last week he would accept the post."

"Yes, I know," said Harrington. "I read it in his column."

Leonard got down to business. "I won't impose too much upon your time," he said. "I've already done the basic research on you."

"It's quite all right," said Harrington. "Take all the time you want. I haven't a single thing to do until this evening, when I have dinner with my mother."

Leonard's eyebrows raised a bit. "Your mother is still living?"

"Very spry," said Harrington, "for all she's eighty-three. A sort of Whistler's mother. Serene and beautiful."

"You're lucky. My mother died when I was still quite young."

"I'm sorry to hear of it," said Harrington. "My mother is a gentlewoman to her fingertips. You don't find many like her now. I am positive I owe a great deal of what I am to her. Perhaps the thing I'm proudest of is what your book editor, Cedric Madison, wrote about me quite some years ago. I sent a note to thank him at the time and I fully meant to look him up someday, although I never did. I'd like to meet the man."

"What was it that he said?"

"He said, if I recall correctly, that I was the last surviving gentleman."

"That's a good line," Leonard said. "I'll have to look it up. I think you might like Cedric. He may seem slightly strange at times, but he's a devoted man, like you. He lives in his office, almost day and night."

Leonard reached into his briefcase and brought out a sheaf of notes, rustling through them until he found the page he wanted.

"We'll do a full-length profile on you," he told Harrington. "A cover and an inside spread with pictures. I know a great deal about you, but there still are some questions, a few inconsistencies."

"I'm not sure I follow you."

"You know how we operate," said Leonard. "We do exhaustive checking to be sure we have the background facts, then we go out and get the human facts. We talk with our subject's boyhood chums, his teachers, all the people who might have something to contribute to a better understanding of the man himself. We visit the places he has lived, pick up the human story, the little anecdotes. It's a demanding job, but we pride ourselves on the way we do it."

"And rightly so, young man."

"I went to Wyalusing in Wisconsin," said the man from the magazine. "That's where the data said that you were born."

"A charming place as I remember it," said Harrington. "A little town, sandwiched between the river and the hills."

"Mr. Harrington."

"Yes?"

"You weren't born there."

"I beg your pardon?"

"There's no birth record at the county seat. No one remembers you."

"Some mistake," said Harrington. "Or perhaps you're joking."

"You went to Harvard, Mr. Harrington. Class of '27."

"That is right. I did."

"You never married, sir."

"There was a girl. She died."

"Her name," said Leonard, "was Cornelia Storm."

"That was her name. The fact's not widely known."

"We are thorough, Mr. Harrington, in our background work."

"I don't mind," said Harrington. "It's not a thing to hide. It's just not a fact to flaunt."

"Mr. Harrington."

"Yes."

"It's not Wyalusing only. It's all the rest of it. There is no record that you went to Harvard. There never was a girl named Cornelia Storm."

Harrington came straight out of his chair.

"That is ridiculous!" he shouted. "What can you mean by it?"

"I'm sorry," Leonard said. "Perhaps I could have found a better way of telling you than blurting it all out. Is there anything—"

"Yes, there is," said Harrington. "I think you'd better leave."

"Is there nothing I can do? Anything at all?"

"You've done quite enough," said Harrington. "Quite enough, indeed."

He sat down in the chair again, gripping its arms with his shaking hands, listening to the man go out.

When he heard the front door close, he called to Adams to come in.

"Is there something I can do for you?" asked Adams.

"Yes. You can tell me who I am."

"Why, sir," said Adams, plain-

ly puzzled, "you're Mr. Hollis Harrington."

"Thank you, Adams," said Harrington. "That's who I thought I was!"

Dusk had fallen when he wheeled the car along the familiar street and drew up to the curb in front of the old, white-pillared house set well back from the front of wide, tree-shaded grounds.

He cut the engine and got out, standing for a moment to let the sense of the street soak into him—the correct and orderly, the aristocratic street, a refuge in this age of materialism. Even the cars that moved along it, he told himself, seemed to be aware of the quality of the street, for they went more slowly and more silently than they did on other streets and there was about them a sense of decorum one did not often find in a mechanical contraption.

He turned from the street and went up the walk, smelling in the dusk the awakening life of gardens in the springtime, and he wished that it were light, for Henry, his mother's gardener, was quite famous for his tulips.

As he walked along the path, with the garden scent, he felt the strange sense of urgency and of panic drop away from him, for the street and house were in themselves assurances that everything was exactly as it should be.

He mounted the brick steps

and went across the porch and reached out his hand for the knocker on the door.

There was a light in the sitting room and he knew his mother would be there, waiting for him to arrive, but that it would be Tilda, hurrying from the kitchen, who would answer to his knock, for his mother did not move about as briskly as she had.

He knocked and waited and as he waited he remembered the happy days he'd spent in this house before he'd gone to Harvard, when his father still was living. Some of the old families still lived here, but he'd not seen them for years, for on his visits lately he'd scarcely stirred outdoors, but sat for hours talking with his mother.

The door opened, and it was not Tilda in her rustling skirts and her white starched collar, but an utter stranger.

"Good evening," he said. "You must be a neighbor."

"I live here," said the woman.

"I can't be mistaken," said Harrington. "This is the residence of Mrs. Jennings Harrington."

"I'm sorry," said the woman. "I do not know the name. What was the address you were looking for?"

"2034 Summit Drive."

"That's the number," said the woman, "but Harrington—I know of no Harringtons. We've lived here fifteen years and there's never been a Harrington in the neighborhood."



"Madam," Harrington said, sharply, "this is most serious—"

The woman closed the door.

He stood on the porch for long moments after she had closed the door, once reaching out his hand to clang the knocker again, then withdrawing it. Finally he went back to the street.

He stood beside the car, looking at the house, trying to catch in it some unfamiliarity—but it was familiar. It was the house to which he'd come for years to see his mother; it was the house in which he'd spent his youth.

He opened the car door and slid beneath the wheel. He had trouble getting the key out of his pocket and his hand was shaking so that it took a long time for him to insert it in the ignition lock.

He twisted the key and the engine started. He did not, however, drive off immediately, but sat gripping the wheel. He kept staring at the house and his mind hurled back the fact again and yet again that strangers had lived behind its walls for more than fifteen years.

Where, then, were his mother and her faithful Tilda? Where, then, was Henry, who was a hand at tulips? Where the many evenings he had spent in that very house? Where the conversations in the sitting room, with the birch and maple burning in the fireplace and the cat asleep upon the hearth?

There was a pattern, he was reminded—a deadly pattern—in all that had ever happened to him; in the way that he had lived, in the books that he had written, in the attachments he had had and, perhaps, more important, the ones he had not had. There was a haunting quality that had lurked behind the scenes, just out of sight, for years, and there had been many times he'd been aware of it and wondered at it and tried to lay his fingers on it—but never a time when he'd ever been quite so acutely aware of it as this very moment.

It was, he knew, this haunted factor in his life which kept him steady now, which kept him from storming up the walk again to hammer at the door and demand to see his mother.

He saw that he had stopped shaking, and he closed the window and put the car in gear.

He turned left at the next corner and began to climb, street after street.

He reached the cemetery in ten minutes' time and parked the car. He found the topcoat in the rear seat and put it on. For a moment, he stood beside the car and looked down across the town, to where the river flowed between the hills.

This, he told himself, at least is real, the river and the town. This no one could take away from him, or the books upon the shelf.

He let himself into the ceme-

tery by the postern gate and followed the path unerringly in the uncertain light of a sickle moon.

The stone was there and the shape of it unchanged; it was a shape, he told himself, that was burned into his heart. He knelt before it and put out his hands and laid them on it and felt the moss and lichens that had grown there and they were familiar, too.

"Cornelia," he said. "You are still here, Cornelia."

He fumbled in his pocket for a pack of matches and lit three of them before the fourth blazed up in a steady flame. He cupped the blaze between his hands and held it close against the stone.

A name was graven there.

It was not Cornelia Storm.

Senator Johnson Enright reached out and lifted the decanter.

"No, thanks," said Harrington. "This one is all I wish. I just dropped by to say hello. I'll be going in a minute."

He looked around the room in which they sat and now he was sure of it—sure of the thing that he had come to find. The study was not the same as he had remembered it. Some of the bright was gone, some of the glory vanished. It was faded at the edges and it seemed slightly out of focus and the moose head above the mantle was somehow just a little shabby, instead of grand and noble.

"You come too seldom," said the senator, "even when you know that you are always welcome. Especially tonight. The family are all out and I'm a troubled man."

"This business of the state department?"

Enright nodded. "That is it exactly. I told the President, yes, I would take it if he could find no one else. I almost pleaded with him to find another man."

"You could not tell him no?"

"I tried to," said the senator. "I did my best to tell him. I, who never in my life have been at a loss for words. And I couldn't do it. Because I was too proud. Because through the years I have built up in me a certain pride of service that I cannot turn my back upon."

The senator sat sprawling in his chair and Harrington saw that there was no change in him, as there had been in the room within which they sat. He was the same as ever—the iron-gray unruly mop of hair, the woodchopper face, the snaggle teeth, the hunched shoulders of a grizzly.

"You realize, of course," said Enright, "that I have been one of your most faithful readers."

"I know," said Harrington. "I am proud of it."

"You have a fiendish ability," said the senator, "to string words together with fishhooks hidden in them. They fasten into you and they won't let loose and you go

around remembering them for days."

He lifted up his glass and drank.

"I've never told you this before," he said. "I don't know if I should, but I suppose I'd better. In one of your books you said that the hallmark of destiny might rest upon one man. If that man failed, you said, the world might well be lost."

"I think I did say that. I have a feeling . . ."

"You're sure," asked the senator, reaching for the brandy, "that you won't have more of this?"

"No, thanks," said Harrington. And suddenly he was thinking of another time and place where he'd once gone drinking and there had been a shadow in the corner that had talked with him—and it was the first time he'd ever thought of that. It was something, it seemed, that had never happened, that could not remotely have happened to Hollis Harrington. It was a happening that he would not—could not—accept, and yet there it lay, cold and naked in his brain.

"I was going to tell you," said the senator, "about that line on destiny. A most peculiar circumstance, I think you will agree. You know, of course, that one time I had decided to retire."

"I remember it," said Harrington. "I recall I told you that you should."

"It was at that time," said the

senator, "that I read that paragraph of yours. I had written out a statement announcing my retirement at the completion of my term and intended in the morning to give it to the press. Then I read that line and asked myself what if I were that very man you were writing of. Not, of course, that I actually thought I was."

Harrington stirred uneasily. "I don't know what to say. You place too great a responsibility upon me."

"I did not retire," said the senator. "I tore up the statement."

They sat quietly for a moment, staring at the fire flaming on the hearth.

"And now," said Enright, "there is this other thing."

"I wish that I could help," said Harrington, almost desperately. "I wish that I could find the proper words to say. But I can't, because I'm at the end myself. I am written out. There's nothing left inside me."

And that was not, he knew, what he had wished to say. *I came here to tell you that someone else has been living in my mother's house for more than fifteen years, that the name on Cornelia's headstone is not Cornelia's name. I came here to see if this room had changed and it has changed. It has lost some of its old baronial magic . . .*

But he could not say it. There was no way to say it. Even to so

close a friend as the senator it was impossible.

"Hollis, I am sorry," said the senator.

It was all insane, thought Harrington. He was Hollis Harrington. He had been born in Wisconsin. He was a graduate of Harvard and—what was it Cedric Madison had called him—the last surviving gentleman.

His life had been correct to the last detail, his house correct, his writing most artistically correct—the result of good breeding to the fingertips.

Perhaps just slightly too correct. Too correct for this world of 1962, which had sloughed off the final vestige of the old punctilio.

He was Hollis Harrington, last surviving gentleman, famous writer, romantic figure in the literary world—and written out, wrung dry of all emotion, empty of anything to say since he had finally said all that he was capable of saying.

He rose slowly from his chair.

"I must be going, Johnson. I've stayed longer than I should."

"There is something else," said the senator. "Something I've always meant to ask you. Nothing to do with this matter of myself. I've meant to ask you many times, but felt perhaps I shouldn't, that it might somehow . . ."

"It's quite all right," said Harrington. "I'll answer if I can."

"One of your early books," said

the senator "*A Bone to Gnaw*, I think."

"That," said Harrington, "was many years ago."

"This central character," said the senator. "This Neanderthaler that you wrote about. You made him seem so human."

Harrington nodded. "That is right. That is what he was. He was a human being. Just because he lived a hundred thousand years ago—"

"Of course," said the senator. "You are entirely right. But you had him down so well. All your other characters have been sophisticates, people of the world. I have often wondered how you could write so convincingly of that kind of man—an almost mindless savage."

"Not mindless," said Harrington. "Not really savage. A product of his times. I lived with him for a long time, Johnson, before I wrote about him. I tried to put myself into his situation, think as he did, guess his viewpoint. I knew his fears and triumphs. There were times, I sometimes think, that I was close to being him."

Enright nodded solemnly. "I can well believe that. You really must be going? You're sure about that drink?"

"I'm sorry, Johnson. I have a long way to drive."

The senator heaved himself out of the chair and walked with him to the door.

"We'll talk again," he said, "and soon. About this writing business. I can't believe you're at the end of it."

"Maybe not," said Harrington. "It may all come back."

But he only said it to satisfy the senator. He knew there was no chance that it would come back.

They said good-night and Harrington went trudging down the walk. And that was wrong—in all his life, he'd never trudged before.

His car was parked just opposite the gate and he stopped beside it, staring in astonishment, for it was not his car.

His had been an expensive, dignified model, and this one was not only one of the less expensive kinds, but noticeably decrepit.

And yet it was familiar in a vague and tantalizing way.

And here it was again, but with a difference this time, for in this instance he was on the verge of accepting unreality.

He opened the door and climbed into the seat. He reached into his pocket and found the key and fumbled for the ignition lock. He found it in the dark and the key clicked into it. He twisted, and the engine started.

Something came struggling up from the mist inside his brain. He could feel it struggle and he knew what it was. It was Hollis Harrington, final gentleman.

He sat there for a moment and in that moment he was neither

final gentleman nor the man who sat in the ancient car, but a younger man and a far-off man who was drunk and miserable.

He sat in a booth in the farthest, darkest corner of some unknown establishment that was filled with noise and smell and in a corner of the booth that was even darker than the corner where he sat was another one, who talked.

He tried to see the stranger's face, but it either was too dark or there was no face to see. And all the time the faceless stranger talked.

There were papers on the table, a fragmented manuscript, and he knew it was no good and he tried to tell the stranger how it was no good and how he wished it might be good, but his tongue was thick and his throat was choked.

He couldn't frame the words to say it, but he felt it inside himself—the terrible, screaming need of putting down on paper the conviction and belief that shouted for expression.

And he heard clearly only one thing that the stranger said.

"I am willing," said the stranger, "to make a deal with you."

And that was all there was. There was no more to remember.

And there it stood—that ancient, fearsome thing—an isolated remembrance from some former life, an incident without a past or future and no connection with him.

The night suddenly was chilly and he shivered in the chill. He put the car in gear and pulled out from the curb and drove slowly down the street.

He drove for half an hour or more and he was still shivering from the chilly night. A cup of coffee, he thought, might warm him and he pulled the car up to the curb in front of an all-night quick-and-greasy. And realized with some astonishment that he could not be more than a mile or two from home.

There was no one in the place except a shabby blonde who lounged behind the corner, listening to a radio.

He climbed up on a stool.

"Coffee, please," he said and while he waited for her to fill the cup he glanced about the place. It was clean and cozy with the cigarette machines and the rack of magazines lined against the wall.

The blonde set the cup down in front of him.

"Anything else?" she asked, but he didn't answer, for his eye had caught a line of printing across the front of one of the more lurid magazines.

"Is that all?" asked the blonde again.

"I guess so," said Harrington. "I guess that's all I want."

He didn't look at her; he was still staring at the magazine.

Across the front of it ran the glaring lines:

## THE ENCHANTED WORLD OF HOLLIS HARRINGTON!

Cautiously he slid off the stool and stalked the magazine. He reached out quickly and snatched it from the rack before it could elude him. For he had the feeling, until he had it safely in his hand, that the magazine would be like all the rest of it, crazy and unreal. . . He took it back to the counter and laid it down and stared at the cover and the line stayed there. It did not change; it did not go away. He extended his thumb and rubbed the printed words and they were real enough.

He thumbed swiftly through the magazine and found the article and staring out at him was a face he knew to be his own, although it was not the kind of face he had imagined he would have—it was a somewhat younger, darker face that tended to untidiness, and beneath that face was another face that was without a doubt a face of great distinction. And the caption that ran between them asked a question: *Which one of these men is really Hollis Harrington?*

There was as well a picture of a house that he recognized in all its ramshackleness and below it another picture of the same house, but highly idealized, gleaming with white paint and surrounded by neatly tended grounds—a house with character.

He did not bother with the

reading of the caption that ran between the houses. He knew what it would say.

And the text of the article itself:

*Is Hollis Harrington really more than one man? Is he in actuality the man he thinks he is, a man he has created out of his own mind, a man who moves in an incredibly enchanted world of good living and good manners? Or is this attitude no more than a carefully cultivated pose, an exceptional piece of perfect showmanship? Or could it be that to write in the manner that he does, to turn out the sleekly tailored, thoughtful, often significant prose that he has been writing for more than thirty years, it is necessary that he create for himself another life than the one he really lives, that he has forced himself to accept this strange internal world of his and believe in it as a condition to his continued writing. . . .*

A hand came out and spread itself across the page so he could not read and he looked up quickly. It was the hand of the waitress and he saw there was a shining in her eyes that was very close to tears.

"Mr. Harrington," she said. "Please, Mr. Harrington. Please don't read it, sir."

"But, miss . . ."

"I told Harry that he shouldn't let them put in that magazine. I told him he should hide it. But he said you never came in here except on Saturdays."

"You mean," asked Harrington, "that I've been here before?"

"Almost every Saturday," she told him, surprised. "Every Saturday for years. You like our cherry pie. You always have a piece of our cherry pie."

"Yes, of course," he said.

But, actually, he had no inkling of this place, unless, good God, he thought, unless he had been pretending all the time that it was some other place, some gold-plated eatery of very great distinction.

But it was impossible, he told himself, to pretend as big as that. For a little while, perhaps, but not for thirty years. No man alone could do it unless he had some help.

"I had forgotten," he told the waitress. "I'm somewhat upset tonight. I wonder if you have a piece of that cherry pie."

"Of course," the waitress said.

She took the pie off the shelf and cut a wedge and slid it on the plate. She put the plate down in front of him and laid a fork beside it.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Harrington," she said. "I'm sorry I didn't hide the magazine. You must pay no attention to it—or to anything. Not to any of the things that people say or what other people write. All of us around here are so proud of you."

She leaned across the counter toward him.

"You mustn't mind," she said. "You are too big to mind."

"I don't believe I do," said Hollis Harrington.

And that was the solemn truth, for he was too numb to care. There was in him nothing but a vast wonderment that filled his being so there was room for nothing else.

"I am willing," the stranger in the corner of the booth had told him many years ago. "I am willing to make a deal with you."

But of the deal he had no recollection, no hint of terms or of the purpose of it, although possibly he could guess.

He had written for all of thirty years and he had been well paid for it—not in cash and honor and acclaim alone—but in something else as well. In a great white house standing on a hill with a wilderness of grounds, with an old retainer out of a picture book, with a Whistler's mother, with a romantic bittersweetness tied to a gravestone symbol.

But now the job was done and the pay had stopped and the make believe had ended.

The pay had stopped and the delusions that were a part of it were gone. The glory and the tinsel had been stripped out of his mind. No longer could he see an old and battered car as a sleek, glossy machine. Now, once again, he could read aright the graving on a stone. And the dream of a Whistler's mother had vanished

from his brain—but had been once so firmly planted that on this very evening he actually had driven to a house and an address that was a duplicate of the one imprinted on his imagination.

He had seen everything, he realized, overlain by a grandeur and a lustre out of story books.

But was it possible, he wondered. Could it be made to work? Could a man in all sanity play a game of make-believe for thirty years on end? Or might he be insane?

He considered it calmly and it seemed unlikely, for no insanity could have written as he had written; that he *had* written what he thought he had was proved by the senator's remarks tonight.

So the rest had been make-believe; it could be nothing else. Make-believe with help from that faceless being, whoever he might be, who had made a deal with him that night so long ago.

Although, he thought, it might not take much help. The propensity to kid one's self was strong in the human race. Children were good at it; they became in all reality all the things they pretended that they were. And there were many adults who made themselves believe the things they thought they should believe or the things they merely wanted to believe for their peace of mind.

Surely, he told himself, it would be no great step from this kind of



pretending to a sum total of pretending.

"Mr. Harrington," asked the waitress, "don't you like your pie?"

"Certainly," said Harrington, picking up the fork and cutting off a bite.

So pretending was the pay, the ability to pretend without conscious effort a private world in which he moved alone. And perhaps it was even more than that—perhaps it was a prior condition to his writing as he did, the exact kind of world and life in which it had been calculated, by whatever means, he would do his best.

And the purpose of it?

He had no idea what the purpose was.

Unless, of course, the body of his work was a purpose in itself.

The music in the radio cut off and a solemn voice said: "We interrupt our program to bring you a bulletin. The Associated Press has just reported that the White House has named Senator Johnson Enright as secretary of state. And now, we continue with our music. . . ."

Harrington paused with a bite of pie poised on the fork, halfway to his mouth.

"The hallmark of destiny," he quoted, "may rest upon one man!"

"What was that you said, Mr. Harrington?"

"Nothing. Nothing, miss. Just something I remembered. It's really not important."

Although, of course, it was.

How many other people in the world, he wondered, might have read a certain line out of one of his books? How many other lives might have been influenced in some manner from the reading of a phrase that he had written?

And had he had help in the writing of those lines? Did he have actual talent or had he merely written the thoughts that lay in other minds? Had he had help in writing as well as in pretending? Might that be the reason now he felt so written out?

But however that might be, it was all over now. He had done the job and he had been fired. And the firing of him had been as efficient and as thorough as one might well expect—all the mumbo-jumbo had been run in competent reverse, beginning with the man from the magazine this morning. Now here he sat, a humdrum human being perched upon a stool, eating cherry pie.

How many other humdrum humans might have sat, as he sat now, in how many ages past, released from their dream-life as he had been released, trying with no better luck than he was having to figure out what had hit them? How many others, even now, might still be living out a life of make-believe as he had lived for thirty years until this very day?

For it was ridiculous, he realized, to suppose he was the only

one. There would be no point in simply running a one-man make-believe.

How many eccentric geniuses had been, perhaps, neither geniuses nor eccentric until they, too, had sat in some darkened corner with a faceless being and listened to his offer?

Suppose—just suppose—that the only purpose in his thirty years had been that Senator Johnson Enright should not retire from public life and thus remain available to head the state department now? Why, and to whom, could it be so important that one particular man get on certain post? And was it important enough to justify the use of one man's life to achieve another's end?

Somewhere, Harrington told himself, there had to be a clue. Somewhere back along the tangled skein of those thirty years there must be certain signposts which would point the way to the man or thing or organization, whatever it might be.

He felt dull anger stirring in him, a formless, senseless, almost hopeless anger that had no direction and no focal point.

A man came in the door and took a stool one removed from Harrington.

"Hi, Gladys," he bellowed.

Then he noticed Harrington and smote him on the back. "Hi, there, pal," he trumpeted. "Your name's in the paper."

"Quiet down, Joe," said Gladys. "What is it that you want?"

"Gimme a hunk of apple pie and a cuppa coffee."

The man, Harrington saw, was big and hairy. He wore a Teamsters badge.

"You said something about my name being in the paper."

Joe slapped down a folded paper.

"Right there on the front page. The story there with your picture in it."

He pointed a grease-stained finger.

"Hot off the press," he yelled and burst into gales of laughter.

"Thanks," said Harrington.

"Well, go ahead and read it," Joe urged boisterously. "Or ain't you interested?"

"Definitely," said Harrington. The headline said:

NOTED AUTHOR  
WILL RETIRE

"So you're quitting," blared the driver. "Can't say I blame you, pal. How many books you written?"

"Fourteen," said Harrington.

"Gladys, can you imagine that! Fourteen books! I ain't even read that many books in my entire life . . ."

"Shut up, Joe," said Gladys, banging down the pie and coffee.

The story said:

*Hollis Harrington, author of*

See My Empty House, *which won him the Nobel prize, will retire from the writing field with the publication of his latest work, Come Back, My Soul.*

*The announcement will be made in this week's issue of Situation magazine, under the byline of Cedric Madison, book editor.*

*Harrington feels, Madison writes, that he has finally, in his forthcoming book, rounded out the thesis which he commenced some thirty years and thirteen books ago . . .*

Harrington's hand closed convulsively upon the paper, crumpling it.

"Wassa matter, pal?"

"Not a thing," said Harrington.

"This Madison is a jerk," said Joe. "You can't believe a thing he says. He is full of . . ."

"He's right," said Harrington. "I'm afraid he's right."

But how could he have known? he asked himself. How could Cedric Madison, that queer, devoted man who practically lived in his tangled office, writing there his endless stream of competent literary criticism, have known a thing like this? Especially, Harrington told himself, since he, himself, had not been sure of it until this very morning.

"Don't you like your pie?" asked Joe. "And your coffee's getting cold."

"Leave him alone," said Gladys,

fiercely. "I'll warm up his coffee."

Harrington said to Joe: "Would you mind if I took this paper?"

"Sure not, pal. I'm through with it. Sports is all I read."

"Thanks," said Harrington. "I have a man to see."

The lobby of the *Situation* building was empty and sparkling—the bright, efficient sparkle that was the trademark of the magazine and the men who made it.

The 12-foot globe, encased in its circular glass shield, spun slowly and majestically, with the time-zone clocks ranged around its base and with the keyed-in world situation markers flashing on its surface.

Harrington stopped just inside the door and glanced around, bewildered and disturbed by the brightness and the glitter. Slowly he oriented himself. Over there the elevators and beside them the floor directory board. There the information counter, now unoccupied, and just beyond it the door that was marked:

HARVEY

Visiting Hours

9 to 5 on Week Days

Harrington crossed to the directory and stood there, craning his neck, searching for the name. And found it.

CEDRIC MADISON . . . 317

He turned from the board and pressed the button for the elevator.

On the third floor the elevator stopped and he got out of it and to his right was the newsroom and to his left a line of offices flanking a long hall.

He turned to the left and 317 was the third one down. The door was open and he stepped inside. A man sat behind a desk stacked high with books, while other books were piled helter-skelter on the floor, and still others bulged the shelves upon the walls.

"Mr. Madison?" asked Harrington and the man looked up from the book that he was reading.

And suddenly Harrington was back again in that smoky, shadowed booth where long ago he'd bargained with the faceless being—but no longer faceless. He knew by the aura of the man and the sense of him, the impelling force of personality, the disquieting, obscene feeling that was a kind of psychic spoor.

"Why, Harrington!" cried the faceless men, who now had taken on a face. "How nice that you dropped in! It's incredible that the two of us . . ."

"Yes, isn't it," said Harrington.

He scarcely knew he said it. It was, he realized, an automatic thing to say, a putting up of hands to guard against a blow, a pure and simple defense mechanism.

Madison was on his feet now and coming around the desk to

greet him, and if he could have turned and run, Harrington would have fled. But he couldn't run; he was struck and frozen; he could make no move at all beyond the automatic ones of austere politeness that had been drilled into him through thirty years of simulated aristocratic living.

He could feel his face, all stiff and dry with the urbane deadpan that he had affected—and he was grateful for it, for he knew that it would never do to show in any way that he had recognized the man.

"It's incredible that the two of us have never met," said Madison, "I've read so much of what you've written and liked so much everything I've read."

"It's good of you to say so," said the urbane, unruffled part of Harrington, putting out his hand. "The fault we have never met is entirely mine. I do not get around as much as I really should."

He felt Madison's hand inside his own and closed his fingers on it in a sense of half-revulsion, for the hand was dry and cold and very like a claw. The man was vulture-like—the tight, dessicated skin drawn tight across the death-head face, the piercing, restless eyes, the utter lack of hair, the knife-like slash of mouth.

"You must sit down," said Madison, "and spend some time with me. There are so many things we have to talk about."

There was just one empty chair; all the others overflowed with books. Harrington sat down in it stiffly, his mouth still dry with fear.

Madison scurried back behind the desk and hunched forward in his chair.

"You look just like your pictures," he declared.

Harrington shrugged. "I have a good photographer—my publisher insists."

He could feel himself slowly coming back to life, recovering from the numbness, the two of him flowing back together into the single man.

"It seems to me," he said, "that you have the advantage of me there. I cannot recall I've ever seen your picture."

Madison waved a waggish finger at him. "I am anonymous," he said. "Surely you must know all editors are faceless. They must not intrude themselves upon the public consciousness."

"That's a fallacy, no doubt," Harrington declared, "but since you seem to value it so much, I will not challenge you."

And he felt a twinge of panic—the remark about editorial facelessness seemed too pat to be coincidental.

"And now that you've finally come to see me," Madison was saying, "I fear it may be in regard to an item in the morning papers."

"As a matter of fact," Harrington

said smoothly, "that is why I'm here."

"I hope you're not too angry."

Harrington shook his head. "Not at all. In fact, I came to thank you for your help in making up my mind. I had considered it, you see. It was something I told myself I should do, but . . ."

"But you were worried about an implied responsibility. To your public, perhaps; perhaps even to yourself."

"Writers seldom quit," said Harrington. "At least not voluntarily. It didn't seem quite crick-et."

"But it was obvious," protested Madison. "It seemed so appropriate a thing for you to do, so proper and so called-for, that I could not resist. I confess I may have wished somewhat to influence you. You've tied up so beautifully what you set out to say so many years ago in this last book of yours that it would be a shame to spoil it by attempting to say more. It would be different, of course, if you had need of money from continued writing, but your royalties—"

"Mr. Madison, what would you have done if I had protested?"

"Why, then," said Madison, "I would have made the most abject apology in the public prints. I would have set it all aright in the best manner possible."

He got up from the desk and scabbled at a pile of books stacked atop a chair.

"I have a review copy of your latest book right here," he said. "There are a few things in it I'd like to chat about with you."

He's a clue, thought Harrington, watching him scramble through the books—but that was all he was. There was more, Harrington was sure, to this business, whatever it might be, than Cedric Madison.

He must get out of here, he knew, as quickly as he could, and yet it must be done in such a manner as not to arouse suspicion. And while he remained, he sternly warned himself, he must play his part as the accomplished man of letters, the final gentleman.

"Ah, here it is!" cried Madison in triumph.

He scurried to the desk, with the book clutched in his hand.

He leafed through it rapidly.

"Now, here, in chapter six, you said . . ."

The moon was setting when Harrington drove through the massive gates and up the curving driveway to the white and stately house perched upon its hill.

He got out of the car and mounted the broad stone steps that ran up to the house. When he reached the top, he halted to gaze down the moon-shadowed slope of grass and tulips, whitened birch and darkened evergreen, and he thought it was the sort of thing a man should see more often—a

breathless moment of haunting beauty snatched from the cycle that curved from birth to death.

He stood there, proudly, gazing down the slope, letting the moon-lit beauty, the etching of the night soak into his soul.

This, he told himself, was one of those incalculable moments of experience which one could not anticipate, or afterwards be able to evaluate or analyze.

He heard the front door open, and slowly turned around.

Old Adams stood in the doorway, his figure outlined by the night lamp on the table in the hall. His snow-white hair was ruffled, standing like a halo round his head, and one frail hand was clutched against his chest, holding together the ragged dressing gown he wore.

"You are late, sir," said Adams. "We were growing a bit disturbed."

"I am sorry," said Harrington. "I was considerably delayed."

He mounted the stoop and Adams stood aside as he went through the door.

"You're sure that everything's all right, sir?"

"Oh, quite all right," said Harrington. "I called on Cedric Madison down at *Situation*. He proved a charming chap."

"If it is all right with you, sir, I'll go back to bed. Knowing you are safely in, I can get some sleep."

"It's quite all right," said Harrington. "Thanks for waiting up."

He stood at the study door and watched Adams trudge slowly up the stairs, then went into the study, turning on the lights.

The place closed in around him with the old familiarity, with the smell of comfort and the sense of being home, and he stood gazing at the rows of calf-bound books, and the ordered desk, the old and home-like chairs, the worn, mellow carpet.

He shrugged out of his topcoat and tossed it on a chair and became aware of the folded paper bulging in his jacket pocket.

Puzzled, he pulled it out and held it in front of him and the headline hit him in the face:

The room changed, a swift and subtle changing. No longer the ordered sanctuary, but a simple workroom for a writing man. No longer the calf-bound volumes in all their elegance upon the shelves, but untidy rows of tattered, dog-eared books. And the carpet was neither worn nor mellow; it was utilitarian and almost brand new.

"My God!" gasped Harrington, almost prayerfully.

He could feel the perspiration breaking out along his forehead and his hands suddenly were shaking and his knees like water.

For he had changed as well as the room had changed; the room had changed because of the change in him.

He was no longer the final gentleman, but that other, more real person he had been this evening. He was himself again; had been jerked back to himself again, he knew, by the headlines in the paper.

He glanced around the room and knew that it finally was right, that all its starkness was real, that this had been the way the room had always been, even when he had made it into something more romantic.

He had found himself this very evening after thirty years and then—he sweat as he thought about it—and then he had lost himself again, easily and without knowing it, without a twitch of strangeness.

He had gone to see Cedric Madison, with this very paper clutched within his hand, had gone without clear purpose—almost, he told himself, as if he were being harried there.

And he had been harried for too long. He had been harried into seeing a room different than it was; he had been made to read a myth-haunted name upon a strange gravestone; he had been deluded into thinking that he had supper often with a mother who had long been dead; he had been forced to imagine that a common quick-and-greasy was a famous eatery—and, of course, much more than that.

It was humiliating to think upon, but there was more than

mere humiliation—there was a method and a purpose and now it was important, most immediately important, to learn that method and that purpose.

He dropped the paper on the floor and went to the liquor cabinet and got a bottle and a glass. He sloshed liquor in the glass and gulped it.

You had to find a place to start, he told himself, and you worked along from there—and Cedric Madison was a starting point, although he was not the whole of it. No more, perhaps, than a single clue, but at least a starting point.

He had gone to see Cedric Madison and the two of them had sat and talked much longer than he planned, and somewhere in that talk he'd slid smoothly back into the final gentleman.

He tried to drive his mind and memory along the pathway of those hours, seeking for some break, hunting for the moment he had changed, but there was nothing. It ironed out flat and smooth.

But somewhere he had changed, or more likely had been changed, back into the masquerade that had been forced upon him long years in the past.

And what would be the motive of that masquerade? What would be the reason in changing a man's life, or, more probably, the lives of many men?

A sort of welfare endeavor, perhaps. A matter of rampant do-

goodism, an expression of the itch to interfere in other people's lives.

Or was there here a conscious, well-planned effort to change the course of world events, to so alter the destiny of mankind as to bring about some specific end-result? That would mean that whoever, or whatever, was responsible possessed a sure method of predicting the future, and the ability to pick out the key factors in the present which must be changed in order effectively to change that future in the desired direction.

From where it stood upon the desk the phone snarled viciously.

He swung around in terror, frightened at the sound.

The phone snarled a second time.

He strode to the desk and answered. It was the senator.

"Good," said the senator. "I did not get you up."

"No. I was just getting ready to turn in.

"You heard the news, of course."

"On the radio," said Harrington.

"The White House called . . ."

"And you had to take it."

"Yes, of course, but then . . ."

There was a gulping, breathing sound at the other end as if the senator were on the verge of strangling.

"What's the matter, Johnson? What is going—"

"Then," said the senator, "I had a visitor."



Harrington waited.

"Preston White," said the senator. "You know him, of course."

"Yes. The publisher of *Situation*."

"He was conspiratorial," said the senator. "And a shade dramatic. He talked in whispers and very confidentially. As if the two of us were in some sort of deal."

"But what—"

"He offered me," said the senator, almost strangling with rage, "the exclusive use of Harvey—"

Harrington interrupted, without knowing why—almost as if he feared to let the senator go on.

"You know," he said, "I can remember, many years ago—I was just a lad—when Harvey was installed down in the *Situation* office."

And he was surprised at how well he could remember it—the great hurrah of fanfare. Although at that time, he recalled, no one had put too much credence in the matter, for *Situation* was then notorious for its circulation stunts. But it was different now. Almost everyone read the Harvey column and even in the most learned of circles it was quoted as authority.

"Harvey!" spat the senator. "A geared-up calculator! A mechanical predictor!"

And that was it, Harrington thought wildly. That was the very thing for which he had been groping!

For Harvey was a predictor. He

predicted every week and the magazine ran a column of the predictions he spewed out.

"White was most persuasive," said the senator. "He was very buddy-buddy. He placed Harvey at my complete disposal. He said that he would let me see all the predictions that he made immediately he made them and that he'd withhold from publication any that I wished."

"It might be a help, at that," said Harrington.

For Harvey was good. Of that there was no question. Week after week he called the shots exactly, right straight down the line.

"I'll have none of it!" yelled the senator. "I'll have no part of Harvey. He is the worst thing that could have happened so far as public opinion is concerned. The human race is entirely capable, in its own good judgment, of accepting or rejecting the predictions of any human pundit. But out technological society has developed a conditioning factor that accepts the infallibility of machines. It would seem to me that *Situation*, in using an analytical computer, humanized by the name of Harvey, to predict the trend of world events, is deliberately preying upon public gullibility. And I'll have no part of it. I will not be tarred with—"

"I knew White was for you," said Harrington. "I knew he favored your appointment, but—"

"Preston White," said the senator, "is a dangerous man. Any powerful man is a dangerous man, and in our time the man who is in a position to mould public opinion is the most powerful of them all. I can't afford to be associated with him in any way at all. Here I stand, a man of some forty years of service, without, thank God, a single smudge upon me. What would happen to me if someone came along and pegged this man White—but good? How would I stand then?"

"They almost had him pegged," said Harrington, "that time years ago when the congressional committee investigated him. As I remember, much of the testimony at that time had to do with Harvey."

"Hollis," said the senator, "I don't know why I trouble you. I don't know why I phoned you. Just to blow off steam, I guess."

"I am glad you did," said Harrington. "What do you intend to do?"

"I don't know," said the senator. "I threw White out, of course, so my hands theoretically are clean, but it's all gone sour on me. I have a vile taste in my mouth."

"Sleep on it," said Harrington. "You'll know better in the morning."

"Thanks, Hollis, I think I will," said the senator. "Good night."

Harrington put up the phone and stood stiff beside the desk.

For now it all was crystal clear.

Now he knew without a doubt exactly who it was that had wanted Enright in the state department.

It was precisely the kind of thing, he thought, one could expect of White.

He could not imagine how it had been done—but if there had been a way to do it, White would have been the one to ferret out that way.

He'd engineered it so that Enright, by reading a line out of a book, had stayed in public life until the proper time had come for him to head the state department.

And how many other men, how many other situations, stood as they did tonight because of the vast schemings of one Preston White?

He saw the paper on the floor and picked it up and looked at the headline, then threw it down again.

They had tried to get rid of him, he thought, and it would have been all right if he'd just wandered off like an old horse turned out to pasture, abandoned and forgotten. Perhaps all the others had done exactly that. But in getting rid of him, in getting rid of anyone, they must have been aware of a certain danger. The only safe and foolproof way would have been to keep him on, to let him go on living as the final gentleman until his dying day.

Why had they not done that? Was it possible, for example, that

there were limitations on the project, that the operation, whatever its purpose, had a load capacity that was now crammed to its very limit? So that, before they could take on someone else, they must get rid of him?

If that were true, it very well could be there was a spot here where they were vulnerable.

And yet another thing, a vague remembrance from that congressional hearing of some years ago—a sentence and a picture carried in the papers at the time. The picture of a very puzzled man, one of the top technicians who had assembled Harvey, sitting in the witness chair and saying: “But, senator, I tell you no analytical computer can be anywhere near as good as they claim Harvey is.”

And it might mean something and it might not, Harrington told himself, but it was something to remember, it was a hope to which to cling.

Most astonishing, he thought placidly, how a mere machine could take the place of thinking man. He had commented on that before, with some asperity, in one of his books—he could not recall which one. As Cedric Madison had said this very evening . . .

He caught himself in time.

In some dim corner of his brain an alarm was ringing, and he dived for the folded paper he had tossed onto the floor.

He found it, and the headline

screamed at him and the books lost their calf-bound elegance and the carpeting regained its harsh newness, and he was himself once more.

He knelt, sobbing, on the floor, the paper clutched in a shaky hand.

No change, he thought, no warning!

And a crumpled paper the only shield he had.

But a powerful shield, he thought.

*Try it again!* he screamed at Harvey. *Go ahead and try!*

Harvey didn't try.

If it had *been* Harvey. And, he told himself, of course he didn't know.

Defenseless, he thought, except for a folded paper with a headline set in 18 point caps.

Defenseless, with a story that no one would believe even if he told it to them.

Defenseless, with thirty years of eccentricity to make his every act suspect.

He searched his mind for help and there was no help. The police would not believe him and he had few friends to help, for in thirty years he had made few friends.

There was the senator—but the senator had troubles of his own.

And there was something else—there was a certain weapon that could be used against him. Harvey only had to wait until he went to sleep. For if he went to sleep, there

was no doubt he'd wake the final gentleman and more than likely then remain the final gentleman, even more firmly the final gentleman than he'd ever been before. For if they got him now, they'd never let him go.

He wondered, somewhat vaguely, why he should fight against it so. The last thirty years had not been so bad; the way they had been passed would not be a bad way, he admitted, being honest with himself, to live out the years that he had left in him.

But the thought revolted him as an insult to his very humanness. He had a right to be himself, perhaps even an obligation to remain himself, and he felt a deep-banked anger at the arrogance that would make him someone else.

The issue was straightly drawn, he knew. Two facts were crystal clear: Whatever he did, he must do himself; he must expect no help. And he must do it now before he needed sleep.

He clambered to his feet, with the paper in his hand, squared his shoulders and turned toward the door. But at the door he halted, for a sudden, terrible truth had occurred to him.

Once he left the house and went out into the darkness, he would be without his shield. In the darkness the paper would be worthless since he would not be able to read the headline.

He glanced at his watch and it

was just after three. There were still three hours of darkness and he couldn't wait three hours.

He needed time, he thought. He must somehow buy some time. Within the next few hours he must in some way manage to smash or disable Harvey. And while that, he admitted to himself, might not be the whole answer, it would give him time.

He stood beside the door and the thought came to him that he might be wrong—that it might not be Harvey or Madison or White. He had put it all together in his mind and now he'd managed to convince himself. He might, he realized, have hypnotized himself almost as effectively as Harvey or someone else had hypnotized him thirty years ago.

Although probably it had not been hypnotism.

But whatever it might be, he realized, it was a bootless thing to try to thresh out now. There were more immediate problems that badly needed solving.

First of all he must devise some other sort of shield. Defenseless, he'd never reach the door of the *Situation* lobby.

Association, he thought—some sort of association—some way of reminding himself of who and what he was. Like a string around his finger, like a jingle in his brain.

The study door came open and old Adams stood there, clutching his ragged robe together.

"I heard someone talking, sir."

"It was I," said Harrington. "On the telephone."

"I thought, perhaps," said Adams, "someone had dropped in. Although it's an unearthly time of night for anyone to call."

Harrington stood silent, looking at old Adams, and he felt some of his grimness leave him—for Adams was the same, Adams had not changed. He was the only thing of truth in the entire pattern.

"If you will pardon me," said Adams, "your shirt tail's hanging out."

"Thanks," said Harrington. "I hadn't noticed. Thanks for telling me."

"Perhaps you had better get on to bed, sir. It is rather late."

"I will," said Harrington, "in just another minute."

He listened to the shuffling of old Adams slippers going down the hall and began tucking in his shirt tail.

And suddenly it struck him: Shirt tails—they'd be better than a string!

For anyone would wonder, even the final gentleman would wonder, why his shirt tails had a knot in them.

He stuffed the paper in his jacket pocket and tugged the shirt tails entirely free. He had to loosen several buttons before there was cloth enough to make a satisfactory knot.

He made it good and hard, a

square knot so it wouldn't slip, and tight enough so that it would have to be untied before he took off the shirt.

And he composed a silly line that went with the knotted shirt tails:

*I tie this knot because I'm not the final gentleman.*

He went out of the house and down the steps and around the house to the shack where the garden tools were kept.

He lighted matches until he found the maul that he was looking for. With it in his hand, he went back to the car.

And all the time he kept repeating to himself the line:

*I tie this knot, because I'm not the final gentleman.*

The Situation lobby was as brilliant as he remembered it and as silent and deserted and he headed for the door that said HARVEY on it.

He had expected that it would be locked, but it wasn't, and he went through it and closed it carefully behind him.

He was on a narrow catwalk that ran in a circle, with the wall behind him and the railing out in front. And down in the pit circled by the catwalk was something that could be only Harvey.

...Hello, son, it said, or seemed to say, inside his brain.

*Hello, son. I'm glad that you've come home again.*

He stepped forward to the railing eagerly and leaned the maul against it and gripped the railing with both hands to stare down into the pit, enveloped in the feel of father-love that welled up from the thing that squatted in the pit—the old pipe-tweed coat-grizzled whisker love he'd forgotten long ago.

A lump came in his throat and tears smarted in his eyes and he forgot the barren street outside and all the lonely years.

The love kept welling up—the love and understanding and the faint amusement that he should have expected anything but love from an entity to which he had been tied so intimately for all of thirty years.

*You did a good job, son. I am proud of you. I'm glad that you've come home to me again.*

He leaned across the railing, yearning toward the father squatting in the pit, and one of the rails caught against the knotted shirt tail and shoved it hard against his belly.

Reflexes clicked within his brain and he said, almost automatically: *I tie this knot because I'm not . . .*

And then he was saying it consciously and with fervor, like a magic chant.

*I tie this knot because I'm not the final gentleman.*

*I tie this knot because I'm not . . .*

He was shouting now and the sweat streamed down his face and he fought like a drunken man to push back from the railing, and still he was conscious of the father, not insistent, not demanding, but somewhat hurt and puzzled by this ingratitude.

Harrington's hand slipped from the top rail and the fingers touched the handle of the maul and seized and closed upon it and lifted it from the floor to throw.

But even as he lifted it, the door catch snicked behind him and he swung around.

Cedric Madison stood just inside the door and his death-head face wore a look of utter calm.

"Get him off my back!" yelled Harrington. "Make him let loose of me or I will let you have it."

And was surprised to find that he meant every word of it, that a man as mild as he could find it in his heart to kill another man without a second thought.

"All right," said Madison, and the father-love was gone and the world stood cold and hard and empty, with just the two of them standing face to face.

"I'm sorry that this happened, Harrington. You are the first . . ."

"You took a chance," said Harrington. "You tried to turn me loose. What did you expect I would do—moon around and wonder what had happened to me?"

"We'll take you back again. It was a pleasant life. You can live it out."

"I have no doubt you would. You and White and all the rest of —"

Madison sighed, a very patient sigh. "Leave White out of this," he said. "The poor fool thinks that Harvey . . ."

He stopped what he meant to say and chuckled.

"Believe me, Harrington, it's a slick and foolproof setup. It is even better than the oracle at Delphi."

He was sure of himself, so sure that it sent a thrill of apprehension deep through Harrington, a sense of being trapped, of being backed into a corner from which he never could escape.

They had him cold, he thought, between the two of them—Madison in front and Harvey at his rear. Any second now Harvey would throw another punch at him and despite all that he had said, despite the maul he gripped, despite the knotted shirt tails and the silly rhyme, he had grave doubts that he could fight it off.

"I am astonished that you are surprised," Madison was saying smoothly. "For Harvey has been in fact a father to you for all these many years, or the next thing to a father, maybe better than a father. You've been closer to him, day and night, than you've ever been to any other creature. He has

watched over you and watched out for you and guided you at times and the relationship between the two of you has been more real than you can ever guess."

"But why?" asked Harrington and he was seeking furiously for some way out of this, for some defense that might be more substantial than a knotted shirt.

"I do not know how to say this so you will believe it," Madison told him earnestly, "but the father-feeling was no trick at all. You are closer at this moment to Harvey and perhaps even to myself than you can ever be to any other being. No one could work with you as long as Harvey worked with you without forming deep attachments. He, and I, have no thought but good for you. Won't you let us prove it?"

Harrington remained silent, but he was wavering—even when he knew that he should not waver. For what Madison had said seemed to make some sense.

"The world," said Madison, "is cold and merciless. It has no pity for you. You've not built a warm and pleasant world and now that you see it as it is no doubt you are repelled by it. There is no reason you should remain in it. We can give you back the world you've known. We can give you security and comfort. Surely you would be happy then. You can gain nothing by remaining as you

are. There is no disloyalty to the human race in going back to this world you love. Now you can neither hurt nor harm the race. Your work is done . . ."

"No!" cried Harrington.

Madison shook his head. "Your race is a queer one, Harrington."

"My race!" yelled Harrington. "You talk as if—"

"There is greatness in you," said Madison, "but you must be pushed to bring it out. You must be cheered and coddled, you must be placed in danger, you must be given problems. You are like so many children. It is my duty, Harrington, my sworn, solemn duty to bring out the greatness in you. And I will not allow you nor anyone to stand against the duty."

And the truth was there, screaming through the dark, dread corridors of belated recognition. It had been there all the time, Harrington told himself, and he should have seen it.

He swung up the maul in a simple reflex action, as a gesture of horror and revulsion, and he heard his screaming voice as if it were some other voice and not his own at all: "Why, damn you, you aren't even human!"

And as he brought the maul up in its arc and forward, Madison was weaving to one side so that the maul would miss, and his face and hands were changing and his body, too—although changing

was perhaps not the word for it. It was a relaxing, rather, as if the body and the face and hands that had been Madison were flowing back again into their normal mould after being held and prisoned into human shape. The human clothes he wore ripped apart with the pressure of the change and hung on him in tatters.

He was bigger, or he seemed to be, as if he had been forced to compress his bigness to conform to human standards, but he was humanoid and there was no essential change in his skull-like face beyond its taking on a faintly greenish cast.

The maul clanged to the floor and skidded on the steel face of the catwalk and the thing that had been Madison was slouching forward with the alien sureness in it. And from Harvey poured a storm of anger and frustration—a father's storming anger at a naughty child which must now stand in punishment. And the punishment was death, for no naughty child must bar the great and solemn duty of a sworn and dedicated task. In that storming fury, even as it rocked his mind, Harrington sensed an essential oneness between machine and alien, as if the two moved and thought in unison.

And there was a snarling and a coughing sound of anger and Harrington found himself moving toward the alien thing with his fin-



gers spread and his muscles tensed for the seizing and the rending of this enemy from the darkness that extended out beyond the cave. He was shambling forward on bowed and sturdy legs and there was fear deep-rooted in his mind, a terrible, shriveling fear that drove him to his work. But above and beyond that fear there was as well the knowledge of the strength within his own brute body.

For a moment he was aghast at the realization that the snarling and the coughing was coming from himself and that the foam of fighting anger was dripping from his jaws. Then he was aghast no longer, for he knew with surety who he was and all that he might have been or might ever have thought was submerged and swept away in sheer bestiality and the driving urge to kill.

His hands reached out and caught the alien flesh and tore at it and broke it and ripped it from the bones, and in the wild, black job of killing scarcely felt or noticed the raking of the other's talons or the stabbing of the beak.

There was a screaming somewhere, a piercing sound of pain and agony from some other place, and the job was done.

Harrington crouched above the body that lay upon the floor and wondered at the growling sounds which still rumbled in his throat.

He stood erect and held out his hands and in the dim light saw

that they were stained with sticky red, while from the pit he heard Harvey's screams dwindle into moaning.

He staggered forward to the railing and looked down into the pit and streams of some dark and stringy substance were pouring out of every crack and joint of Harvey—as if the life and intelligence were draining out of him.

And somewhere a voice (a voice?) was saying: *You fool! Now look at what you've done! What will happen to you now?*

"We'll get along," said Harrington—ordinary Harrington, not the final gentleman, nor yet Neanderthaler.

There was a gash along one arm and the blood was oozing out and soaking the fabric of his torn coat and one side of his face was wet and sticky, but he was all right.

*We kept you on the road*, said the dying voice, now faint and far away. *We kept you on it for so many ages . . .*

Yes, thought Harrington. Yes, my friend, you're right. Once the Delphian oracle and how many eons before that? And clever—once an oracle and in this day an analytical computer. And where in the years between—in monastery? in palace? in some counting house?

Although, perhaps, the operation need not have been continuous. Perhaps it was only necessary at certain crisis points.

And what the actual purpose? To guide the toddling footsteps of humanity, make man think as they wanted him to think? Or to shape humanity to the purpose of an alien race? And what the shape of human culture if there had been no interference?

And he, himself, he wondered—was he the summer-up, the man who had been used to write the final verdict of the centuries of patterning? Not in his words, of course, but in the words of these other two—the one down in the pit, the other on this catwalk. Or were there two of them? Might there have been only one? Was it possible, he wondered, that they were the same—the one of them no more than an extension of the other? For when Madison had died, so had Harvey.

"The trouble with you, friend," he said to the thing lying on the floor, "was that you were too close to human in many ways yourself. You got too confident and you made mistakes."

And the worst mistake of all had been when they'd allowed him to write a Neanderthaler into that early story.

He walked slowly toward the door and stopped at it for a moment to look back at the twisted form that lay huddled on the floor. They'd find it in an hour or two and think at first, perhaps, that it was Madison. Then they'd note the changes and know that it could

not be Madison. And they'd be puzzled people, especially since Madison himself would have disappeared. They'd wonder, too, what had happened to Harvey, who'd never work again. And they'd find the maul!

The maul! Good God, he thought, I almost left the maul!

He turned back and picked it up and his mind was churning with the fear of what might have happened had he left it there. For his fingerprints would be all over it and the police would have come around to find out what he knew.

And his fingerprints would be on the railing, too, he thought. He'd have to wipe them off.

He took out his handkerchief and began to wipe the railing, wondering as he did it why he went to all the trouble, for there would be no guilt associated with this thing he'd done.

*No guilt?* he asked himself. How could he be sure?

Had Madison been a villain or a benefactor?

There was no way, he knew, that anyone could be sure.

Not yet, at least. Not so shortly after. And now perhaps there'd never be any way to know. For the human race had been set so firmly in the track that had been engineered for it, it might never deviate. For the rest of his days he'd wonder about the rightness and the wrongness of this deed he'd done.

He'd watch for signs and portents. He'd wonder if every piece of disturbing news he read might have been averted by this alien that now lay upon the floor. He'd come fighting out of sleep at night, chased by nightmares of an idiot doom that his hand had brought about.

He finished polishing the railing and walked to the door. He polished the knob most carefully and shut the door behind him. And, as a final gesture, he untied the shirt tails.

There was no one in the lobby and no one in the street, and he stood looking up and down the street in the pale cold light of morning.

He cringed against it—against the morning light and against this street that was a symbol of the world. For there seemed to him to be a crying in the street, a crying of his guilt.

There was a way, he knew, that he could forget all this—could wipe it from his mind and leave it all behind him. There was a path that even at this hour led to comfort and security and even, yes, to smugness, and he was tempted by it. For there was no reason that he shouldn't. There was no point in not doing it. No one except himself stood either to gain or to lose.

But he shook his head stubbornly, as if to scare the thought away.

He shifted the maul from one hand to the other and stepped out to cross the street. He reached the car and opened the back door and threw the maul in on the floor.

And he stood there, empty-handed now, and felt the silence beating in long rolls, like relentless surf pounding through his head.

He put up his hands to keep his head from bursting and he felt a terrible weakness in him. He knew it was reaction—nerves suddenly letting go after being taut too long.

Then the stifling silence was no more than an overriding quietness. He dropped his hands.

A car was coming down the street, and he watched it as it parked across from him a short distance up the street.

From it came the shrilling voice of a radio tuned high:

". . . In his note to the President, refusing the appointment, Enright said that after some soul-searching he was convinced it would be better for the country and the world if he did not accept the post. In Washington, foreign policy observers and the diplomatic corps are reported in a dither. What, after all, they ask, could soul-searching have to do with the state department?

"And here is another piece of news this morning that is likewise difficult to assess. Peking announces a reshuffling of its gov-

ernment, with known moderates taking over. While it is too early yet to say, the shift could result in a complete reversal of Red China's policies—"

The radio shut off abruptly and the man got from the car. He slammed the door behind him and went striding down the street.

Harrington opened the front door and climbed behind the wheel. He had the strangest sense that he had forgotten something. He tried to remember what it was, but it was gone entirely.

He sat with his hands clutched upon the wheel and he felt a little shiver running through his body. Like a shiver of relief, although he could not imagine why he should feel relief.

Perhaps over that news about Enright, he told himself. For it was very good news. Not that Enright was the wrong man for the post, for he surely was the right one. But there came a time when a man had the right and duty to be himself entirely.

And the human race, he told

himself, had that same right.

And the shift of government in China was a most amazing thing. As if, he thought, evil geniuses throughout the world might be disappearing with the coming of the dawn.

And there was something about geniuses, he told himself, that he should remember. Something about how a genius came about.

But he could not recall it.

He rolled down the window of the car and sniffed the brisk, fresh breeze of morning. Sniffing it, he consciously straightened his body and lifted up his chin. A man should do a thing like this more often, he told himself contentedly. There was something in the beginning of a day that sharpened up one's soul.

He put the car in gear and wheeled it out into the street.

Too bad about Madison, he thought. He was really, after all, a very decent fellow.

Hollis Harrington, final gentleman, drove down the morning street.



*David R. Bunch is a Civil Service employee of the Aeronautical Chart and Information Center in St. Louis, and an author whose prose and poetry has appeared largely in various of the "little" magazines. The following tale of the future (?) is, we optimistically assume, more a study of certain potential soft spots in human nature than a report on official federal predictions . . . .*

## **A Little Girl's Xmas in Modernia**

*by David R. Bunch*

IT WAS IN JINGLE-BELL WEATHER that Little Sister came across the white yard, the snow between her toes all gray and packed and starting to ball up like the beginnings of two snowmen. For clothing she had nothing, her tiny rump sticking out red-cold and blue-cold, and her little-jewel knees white almost as bones. She stuck up ten stiff hand ends that were her cold fingers, and she said, 'Daddy! Something is wrong at my place! Come see!' She lisped a little perhaps and did not say it all as precisely as grownups, because she was just past four.

He turned like a man in the bottom third of bad dreaming; he pointed two bored eyes at her. Damn the kid, he thought. 'What the hell deal has Mox got us into now?' he said. And he sang the

little rhyme that made the door come open. Then as she stepped toward him he saw the snowballs on her feet. They were melting now, making deep furrows in the green rug spread across his spacious thinking room. The tall nap, like flooded grass now along little canals bending away from her feet, was speckled white here and there with crumpled paper balls. His trial plans and formulas peeped out like golf balls.

Coming back across the iron fields of nightmare that always rose to confront him at such times, he struggled to make the present's puzzling moment into sense. Damn the kid, he thought, didn't wipe her feet. All flesh, as yet—her own—and bone and blood, and didn't wipe her feet. The snow melts!

He motioned her to him. 'Little Sister,' he began in that tired dull-tinny voice that was his now, and must be his, because his larynx was worked all in gold against cancer, 'tell me slowly, Little Sister. Why don't you stay in your plastic place more? Why don't you use the iron Mox more? Why do you bother me at all? Tell me slowly.'

'Daddy!' she cried and started to jig up and down in the fits that he hated so, 'come over to my place, you old boogie. Something needs fixing.'

So they went across the big white yard to her place, past Mother's place, past Little Brother's place, with her snow-hurt limping and naked, and him lumbering in strange stiff-jointedness, but snug in a fire-red snuggie suit of fine insulation with good black leather space high-tops. Arrived at her place he whistled at the door the three sharp notes. The door moved into the wall and Mox the iron one stood sliding the iron sections of his arms up into one another until he had only hands hanging from shoulders. It was his greeting way. He ogled with bulb eyes and flashed his greeting code.

'What would you have done,' her father said, 'if I had not come with you? You brought no whistle for the door.' Three sharp notes sprang at him from the normal holes of her head, and the heavy

door rolled softly out of the wall until it shut them in the gay red-carpeted room with a Xmas tree—the father, the naked little girl and the iron Mox. And she was impishly holding the whistle between her teeth, grinning up at him. 'I had it all along,' she said and dropped the whistle into the tall red grass of her room's carpet.

She wiped the waning snowballs from her feet and sidled her icy-cold rump over toward the slits where the heat came through the wall, soft and perfumed like an island summer. Her knees turned knee-color again and her rump became no longer vari-colored cold. It became the nicest of baby-pink little-girl rumps, and she stood there a health-champion of a little miss, all flesh and bone and blood—as yet—pointing at an angle toward the ceiling. 'The star!' she said. 'The star has fallen down.' And he noticed that she was pointing toward the tree.

'What star?' he started to say, across the fog that always smelled like metal in his mind these last few years, and then he thought, Oh hell, she means the Xmas star. 'You came across all that yard,' he asked incredulously, 'to annoy me with a thing like that, when Mox—?'

'Mox wouldn't,' she broke in. 'I asked him and asked him, but he wouldn't. It's been down since the fifteenth. You remember when those dumb students went home

in their jets early and fast and broke the rules and shook the houses down. BOOM! and the star fell down. Just like that.—Well, he'd just do silly when I asked him, like you just now saw him, just shake his arms up into his shoulders and ogle. Pretty darn dumb, if you ask me.'

'But what about your mother?'

'I asked her when I was over to her place, over a week ago. But she's been too busy and tired. You know how Mama is, always having that plastic guy rubbing parts of her, that she says hurt, and jumping on the bed at any little thing. Sometimes I think that guy's in love with Mama. What's love?'

'What?! What's love? Should I tell you, did I know? Love is—is not an iron ceiling on a plastic . . . But—oh, never mind! Hell! —How's her star?'

*'Twinkle twinkle, little star, how I wonder what you are, up above the world so high, like a mama in the sky. Heard that on the programs advertising diamonds.'*

'Just answer the questions. How's her star?'

'Up real shiny, last I saw. But heck, Mama probably never even looks at her star, because that plastic guy—

'And Little Brother's star?'

'Humph, Little Brother! Beat his star up about a week after we put 'em up. Said it was just what

he needed for the rear end of his space tube. You know how Little Brother is about space.'

'And so yours is the only star that has fallen. Mother's is still up, though she doesn't have time to look at it, you think. Little Brother took his down in the interest of space. Yours just fell.'

'Daddy, where is your star, Daddy?'

He looked at her, and he thought, Damn these little girls. Always so much sentiment. And so schemy, too. He said, 'I had Nugall store my star away. It's somewhere with the tree, in a box. It interfered with my deep thinking. I've got to have entirely a bare room, so far as Xmas trees are concerned, for my deep thinking, if you don't mind.'

For just a moment he thought she was going to get the sniffles. She looked at him, float-eyed, her face ready to buckle and twist into tearful complaint. But she held and stared at him more sternly, and he said, 'Sure I'll fix the damned star for you. Drag me a chair over.—And then I must rush right back to my place.' (Dangerous, this being together too much. And so old-fashioned. And besides, he had been really cooking on a formula when she burst in.) So he stood on the chair she dragged to him, and he fixed the frosti-glass star to its hook in the iron ceiling, and he adjusted the star until it was almost impos-

sible to tell that it wasn't attached to the green plastic tree. Then he whistled at the door.

Just as he was passing through the opening, leaving, he felt something tug at a leg of the fire-red suit. Damn! It was she again. 'What now?' he asked.

'Daddy!' she piped, 'you know what, Daddy? I thought, what if we'd go over to Mother's and Little Brother's places, since it's Xmas. And you've got on your red suit. Isn't this a very special day? I've been hearing on the programs—'

'No,' he said, 'it isn't a very special day. But if you want to—and you'd probably do a fit about it if you didn't get to—come on.' So after she had put on a green snow suit, they trudged across the white yard, a strange study in old Xmas colors, and they stopped first at Little Brother's place, who was just past five.

Dressed in a pressure suit and sturdy beyond all sense, from the weight lifting and the vitamin taking and the breakfast-of-champions eating, he wanted to know what the hell all the nonsense of a visit was about so early. And he let them know that Nogoff, his iron man, was taking care of everything at his place very well, thank you. Then he strode about in his muscles, sturdy beyond all meaning, and he showed them the new jet tube part he had hammered out of the star, and they left

pretty soon from his surliness. On the way over to Mother's place Little Sister suggested that she thought Little Brother thought too much about rockets and jets and space. Didn't Father think so? Father agreed dully that maybe he did, he didn't know, but really, could one ever think too much about rockets and jets and space?

As they walked along, over the yard to Mother's place, she kicked up snow and chortled and laughed and told off-color jokes—she had heard them on the programs—almost like a normal little girl should. Father tracked dourly through the unmarked snow under the featureless gray sky and thought only how all this nonsense of walking so early was making the silver parts of his joints hurt, and before he'd had his morning bracer, too. Yes indeed, Father, for the *most* part, was flesh only in those portions that they had not yet found ways to replace safely. He held on grimly, walking hard, and wished he were back in his hip-snuggie thinking chair where he worked on universal deep problems.

At Mother's place they found her having one of her plasto-rubs from the plastic man, who did truly act a little odd about Mother. Do you suppose he wasn't really all machine but was a man who had been replaced part by part until it was impossible now to tell



where the man left off and the robot plastic began? Father worried about it for half a second and then dismissed it. So what if he was? What could he do to Mother? And what if he did, what would it matter? Mother—new alloys now in almost all the places.

Little Sister yelled MERRY XMAS! at the top of her good flesh lungs, and Mother turned through the waist only, as though on a swivel in that portion, and Father coughed dry in the metal of his embarrassment.

"Twas Little Sister's idea," he mumbled. "So sorry, Marblene. I guess Mox hasn't been watching her programs right, her insisting on Xmas trees and all this year, and now the idea of a visit among the folks of the family. I'm sorry, Marblene." He coughed again. "So out of date."

Mother blazed at him from her very plain blue eyes that were almost all 'replaced' now. It was clear that she wished to continue her rub with the plastic man as soon as possible. 'Well?' she demanded.

'That's all,' he mumbled, 'if Little Sister's ready.' Then for some silly reason—he couldn't explain it afterwards, unless it was because he wasn't all 'replaced' yet—he said a silly thing, something that would obligate him months hence. 'Do you—I mean, would you—I mean, could I,' he stammered, 'could I see you a couple of

minutes, maybe at Easter? Our places are just across the yard from each other, you know. Maybe when I'm all "replaced" I won't be able to walk.' He hated himself for pleading

She airily tossed her left hand, and fluttered those fabulous 'replaced' plastic fingers, and great rays of light shot and quavered and streamed from rings of 'moderne' diamond. 'Why not?' she said resignedly. 'What's to lose? If Jon's through in time—' Jon was her plastic man—'we'll talk a bit on Easter.'

And so it was done, and over, and soon they were again outside in the yard. 'I guess I won't have to walk you back, will I? You have your whistle, don't you?' he said.

'No,' she said, 'I dropped it in the red rug. I just remember I did. I heard it. It squished down in the wet. While the snowballs were melting. Maybe I could come to your place!'

Damn these little girls, he thought. So tricky. Always scheming. He'd have to start having her 'replaced' as soon as he could after Xmas.

'There's nothing of interest at my place,' he hastened to say. 'Just my hip seat and my thinking space and Nugall.' He didn't see any use to tell her about Nig-Nag, the statue woman who wasn't quite all metal, that he kept under the bed until he needed her so much that he had to . . . There were some

things you just didn't tell a daughter, not until she was much older or well on the road toward being all 'replaced.' 'Tell you what we'll do,' he said. 'I'll walk you back to your place and I'll whistle at the door and you can go in to Mox. You star's all fixed and everything. You've had quite a Xmas!'

So they walked back through the iron-cold snow to her place, under a sky that was rapidly thickening in a day turning black. And as her door glided open he felt so relieved that he stooped and kissed her on top of the head, and he tapped her playfully a little on her good flesh buttocks as she passed through the plastic entrance. When she was gone he stood there thinking a little while outside her house. Like an old man in the starting third of good dreaming, he stood nodding, prompted perhaps by things from a time before the time of 'replacements,' wondering maybe if he had not paid some uncalculated

and enormous price for his iron durability.

While he stood thus idly musing, a light high and wee came up suddenly—from eastward, from toward the coast airports—and moved fast down the murky sky toward him, gaining speed. Soon the countryside all around recoiled from a giant blow as the barrier burst. He heard Little Sister behind him scream and beg for him to come back, and he knew without looking that her star was off its iron hook again. Like some frightened monster eager to gain its lair he dug in harder with his metal feet and lumbered off across the yard to his place, anxious to rest again in his hip-snuggie chair, desirous to think further on universal deep problems.

The light, unswerving, went on down the sky, high and wee, like a fleeing piece of star, like something for somewhere else in a great hurry.

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### **Backward, Turn Backward . . .**

*(Upon learning that Pluto is due to cross inside Neptune's orbit in 1979, following which Neptune will be the outermost planet.)*

Now, see here, you! For long decades we've used you as a base  
 For starting on our great crusades to interstellar space.  
 Your gravity is low; you're small; on you, a man could stand;  
 On Neptune we could scarcely crawl, or even lift a hand!  
 It's quite unfair to leave your slot! Your loss leaves awful scars!  
 Without you for a jump-off spot, we'll *never* reach the stars!

—RANDALL GARRETT

*Mr. Edmondson here returns with another adventure of his mad friend—concerning the meteor-stricken Sr. Galindo, who arrived in a land of opportunity with few assets other than an immensely fertile wife and a shrewd way with chickens . . . and who inadvertently may have saved the world.*

## THE GALACTIC CALABASH

*by G. C. Edmondson*

THE AFFAIR OF THE GALACTIC calabash began one Sunday almost a year ago when, after much wheedling, I had induced my mad friend to abstain from suppressing coastal carpet-baggers for one weekend. We were bruising tires and nerves slightly south of the place where U.S. 101 becomes *Carretera Federal Número 2*, when he applied brakes with soul-shattering suddenness.

The cow gazed at us with the equanimity of a Methodist bishop while my friend applied the horn. At imminent risk of impacting a sinus, he lowered the window and shouted raucous Arabic into the damp, maritime air. It sounded like something an Arab might say to a Jew.

But the cow took no offense until my mad friend nudged her gently with the grill. As she trotted away a turgid udder swung, and I was struck with the resemblance

to a Wagnerian soprano we had once known, and said so. My mad friend laughed uproariously.

"What's so funny?" a wife asked from the rear seat.

"A play on words," I explained.

"You'd have to speak Gaelic to understand it," my friend added.

The wives returned to their discussion of whatever it is that wives discuss.

"You'll find him interesting." I referred to the man we were going to visit. I went on to explain how the meteor-stricken Señor Galindo had arrived ten years ago from some pauperous tropic. He had brought little, save an immensely fertile wife, to this brawling, wide-open land of opportunity and inflation far up in the northwest corner of the republic. And now he was a power to be considered.

My mad friend placed his forefinger stiffly to one side of his nose and inhaled with difficulty through

the other. "Serves me right for leaving Arizona," he muttered.

"If you're immune to neosynephrine I have some Scotch snuff."

He shook his head and continued driving. There was a tremendous bump where rain had undermined a bridge approach. My friend registered suffering as he thought of martyred tires.

"Back to the subject," he continued; "man is a theomorph. Therefore, any intelligent being is sure to be anthropomorphic. And please can if you will any hoopla about binary planets with tides being necessary before an air-breather climbs out of his tidal pool. We still haven't made peace with Darwin."

"But you will concede that dogma is not overthrown by admitting these possibilities?"

"We outlived Galileo."

"Turn here," I interrupted. We hurdled a culvert. Yesterday's cloudburst had removed all the topsoil so we crept with agonizing slowness over a jumble of head-sized boulders for the next kilometer. Just over the rise of the hill we came to *La Granja Galindo*.

"Thank God he doesn't call it *hacienda*," my mad friend muttered, "but what's the difference between *granja* and *ranch*?"

"All same: farm and ranch."

The central core of Sr. Galindo's house was a marvel of decrepitude and slipshod construction.

Surrounding it concentrically were the additions which fertility and increasing opulence had forced him to. Though he fully intended someday to erect a palace more in keeping with his present station in life, so far every peso had gone into more of the narrow, corrugated iron edifices which covered the downwind portion of his *granja*.

As I alighted from the car, Sr. Galindo detached himself from the sons, daughters, and employees who were unloading and tallying a truck. He was a large, bald-headed man, much whiter than I or my mad friend, and made a perfect picture of a jovial, Irish bartender until he opened his mouth to shout, "¡Hola! ¿What is new in the *plathvolo* factory?"

"We've converted to cups," I said.

"I thought flying saucers were *platos voladores*," my mad friend muttered.

"Newspaper jargon," I explained. The Saucer Works gag referred to the place where I work—about which no more. We passed a bare, grave-like mound adjoining the kitchen garden and once more I admired the Mexican's practicality. How many men would let a meteorite do the spade-work for a new septic tank?

I presented my mad friend and his wife to Sr. Galindo, whose own wife arrived, wearing knee-length rubber boots and carrying a

clipboard. She favored us with a grin and took our wives in tow toward the kitchen where they could supervise a young *tortillera* and discuss the new botch look which none dared as yet to wear.

"Thank God you speak Spanish," Sr. Galindo said to my friend. "I dislike to inflict my English on persons of discernment."

Galindo's English was fully as bad as he described it. It had been learned mostly during hours spent puzzling over bulletins from the U.S. Dep't. of Agriculture.

After outfitting us with specially disinfected galoshes, he took us on a tour of the long, sheet-iron buildings and explained with loving thoroughness the workings of his fully automated factory. Conveyor belts brought compounded feeds directly from the mill to galleries where 7 kilograms of feed plus measured amounts of antibiotics and water could be counted upon to produce 3 kilograms of dressed-out fryer at the end of 8 weeks. But there was a slightly careworn look about the fryers' beady eyes, also little trilling noises and ruffled plumage. I wondered if my mad friend's aura was incompatible with avian contentment. Sr. Galindo disembarassed me. "Since that accursed aerolith fell," he muttered.

I pressed him for particulars.

"For the past few months they've been a little slow making weight.

"Genetic difficulties?"

Galindo shrugged. "Maybe the strain's playing out. So far it's not serious."

We passed to another gallery where fertile eggs rolled gently from hens to another conveyor, through grading and candling machinery to incubators whence, twenty-one days later, they would be recycled into the eight week grain-to-meat process.

"All this I owe to the *gringos*," Sr. Galindo said expansively. He was a great admirer of Americans with their beautiful machinery and assembly line processes.

"Horse manure!" I spoke with the familiarity of long friendship.

Sr. Galindo glanced at me with a slight, quizzical smile.

"I imagine some small part of it can be laid to Yankee ingenuity," my mad friend said placatingly.

"Damn small," I said, for I remembered the long bouts of legal skirmishing which had built Señor Galindo's business. Before his time every chicken and egg consumed in this territory had been imported from Yankeeland. When the government, in misguided eagerness to protect and promote local industry, had forbidden the importation of eggs and chicken feed, Sr. Galindo had been close to ruin.

But by paying the fantastic interest rates prevalent in an unregulated economy, he had floated and juggled stock issues with an abandon far wilder than any blue-

sky railroad pirate's. By dint of frantic prestidigitation and prevarication Sr. Galindo bought out his American suppliers and transported their equipment to his own side of the border.

Thanks to a total absence of income tax, the Americans were now almost paid off and Sr. Galindo would soon be in the black. Though he admired American efficiency and often talked of emigrating, the jovial Mexican was never quite fool enough to do it.

"What's the new building?" I asked.

"Ah, this you must see." We waded through trays of disinfectant and took off the galoshes. On the way we passed through the *sacrificadora* where fryers were placed on the hooks of a chain which delivered them via scalding tank to a revolving drum with dozens of rubber fingers which plucked feathers and rapped the unwary knuckle which came too near.

Farther down was a table where the fryer's less appetizing portions were removed to ride another conveyor to the cooker which sterilized them before relaying to a far corner of the *granja*.

Señor Galindo's unbelievably handsome son gave me a smile of recognition as his cleaver did things worthy of a Samoan sword dancer. A daughter and another girl I did not recognize were stuffing dismembered fryers into

plastic bags which they shrunk tight with the aid of a vacuum cleaner. A third girl snapped a rubber band over each bag and packed it in a square stacking carton.

As smaller son followed us, plucking periodically at Galindo's sleeve and whispering.

Galindo led us into the new building which was, of course, a freezer. "Let's see those cuckolds" — *cabrónes* was the word he used — "try it again." He was referring to the time a conspiracy had been organized to down the price just when he had thirty-thousand fryers ready to kill and gobbling tons of feed each day.

"What's that thing?" my mad friend asked, pointing at a frost-rimed sphere in one corner of the vast freezing compartment.

Sr. Galindo picked it up with a puzzled air. He juggled it gingerly from hand to hand as we hurried from 60° below out into the watery February sunshine. He placed the sphere atop a bird bath he'd started two years ago and never had time to finish. While he clapped his hands and blew on them the frost began melting. "Ah," he said with a sudden smile, "Now I remember. *Es una calabaza*." Which, owing to a linguistic peculiarity, could mean pumpkin or several kinds of squash, but not calabash.

"Last summer just before the *aerolito* fell," Galindo explained, "my wife planted some. When the

freezer room was finished I needed something for a trial. I saw this magnificent *calabaza* had come unconnected from its vine. 'It will spoil,' I thought, so I put it in the freezer. ¿You like *calabaza*?"

I don't, and I'm sure my mad friend doesn't, but we both assured him we did.

"Tell your mother to put it in the oven," Sr. Galindo said to his offspring who followed us.

"I never heard of baking one whole," I protested.

"You'd need a hacksaw to slice it," my mad friend laughed.

"We always bake them whole where I come from," Galindo explained. "They burst and the seeds fall out. With grated cheese and *salsa picante*—" He raised eyebrows and kissed his fingertips.

I knew the rest of the meal would be good anyhow. We had progressed by this time to the ham-mermill where Sr. Galindo compounded a mash of seeds ranging from rye to kaffir corn, with exact amounts of oyster shell, bone meal, fish meal, and vitamins. Some of the latter came from Germany by routes more devious than a shipment of heroin but their presence spelled the difference between profit and loss for Sr. Galindo's grain-to-meat conversion.

I wondered what the small boy had wanted.

Galindo showed some embarrassment. "You know how hard it is to get anything fixed in this

country. The TV's been acting up." He looked at me hopefully. I promised to do what I could—which, without tools, would probably be very little.

We were admiring a micro-tome and staining apparatus which augmented the microscope I had donated some years ago. Galindo was explaining to my mad friend the auguries performed over sliced liver in his constant war against the diseases which could wipe him out overnight.

My stomach had finally reached the conclusion that my throat was cut when the small boy who had taken the *calabaza* returned with the news that dinner and the ladies awaited.

But as usual, dinner and the ladies needed several finishing touches so I glanced into the front room where the Galindo brood was acquiring its English in painless, Lone Ranger-sized doses, and immediately knew I was off the hook.

"There's nothing wrong with your TV," I told Galindo. "See how the picture tears and the sound razzes in perfect unison? Something around here's setting up interference."

"The refrigeration—" Galindo began hopefully.

I shook my head. There were no neon signs within 10 km. I wondered what could be causing the pulsation. But dinner was finally served so I forgot about it.

Dinner was indeed delicious— young fryers barbecued and drenched in a sauce not so fiery as might be expected from Señora de Galindo's native state of Tabasco. Galindo ate much bread and salad. He ignored the chicken with an intensity which brought to mind the bitter days when he must have eaten little else. The meal was nearly over when he suddenly remembered and asked, "*¿y la calabaza?*"

Galindo's wife shrugged. "Like a rock," she said.

"¿After two hours in the oven? ¡How strange!"

Galindo was buttering a final *birote*, that Mexican creation which looks like a roll and tastes like bread used to taste, when it happened: There was a muffled explosion, more felt than heard, and the oven door flew open.

"¡*La calabaza!*" my wife shrieked, "We forgot to turn off the oven!"

"Those seeds and pulp will stick like glue," Mrs. Galindo moaned. She turned off the oven and we settled down for a final round of coffee, still twittering slightly, like poultry after a fox has been flushed from the hen-house.

The gentlemen retired to another room and discussed the role of the Church in Mexican history. This was interesting for Sr. Galindo was a Mason, while my mad friend was an apologist of such

brilliance that I suspected he might someday follow the path of Giordano Bruno. They were nearing the gauntlet and card exchanging stage when we were interrupted from the kitchen.

"What kind of *calabaza* was that?" Galindo's wife asked. We followed her to the now cool oven.

There were spatters of melted plastic, shattered bits of ceramic, and some extremely miniaturized devices at whose function I could only guess. Intermixed with the whole were rent sections of the covering which had resembled some sort of *calabaza*. I began to wish I'd seen it after the frost melted away.

"¡Aja!" Galindo said with something of a twinkle, "You Americans and your fantastic new weapons."

I started to protest but I knew Sr. Galindo's faith in the American Way would permit no other explanation.

One of the older children came from the front room. "*La televisión funciona perfectamente,*" he reported.

I had a sudden suspicion that I knew the exact moment when it had started functioning perfectly. "Do you mind if I take two or three of those little things that look like they're not broken?" I asked.

"It's yours." Galindo smiled. He didn't have to clean the oven.

Wishing they were mine, I



slipped two of the small things into my pocket.

Late that night as we retraced our path over *Carretera Federal Número 2* to the border, our wives again discussed the botch look, and what effect it would have on eye makeup.

"I can see where Galindo owes something of a debt to the U.S.," my mad friend said.

"Not half what the world owes him," I muttered.

"How come?"

"You know how in those science-fiction yarns you hate so much, some mad scientist always saves the world from destruction?"

My friend made an interrogatory noise.

"Sr. Galindo just did."

"Did what?"

"Saved us from invasion."

"You write so much of that jazz you're beginning to believe it."

I remembered the unhappy condition of Sr. Galindo's fryers. "Wasn't it established several years ago that UHF radiation seems to foul up the compass arrangements in homing pigeons?" I asked.

"Not in the kind of stuff I read," my mad friend said.

"I don't know much about tele-

metering," I said, "But I've seen enough around the Saucer Works to know this isn't ours." I handed him something scraped from Galindo's oven. "It isn't Russian either."

"So?"

"Funny about you mentioning that tide-pool evolution bit today," I said. "I wonder," I wondered, "Just how often a binary system like Earth and Moon occurs? It might pose all sorts of conjectures about climatic conditions for anyone unfamiliar with such a system."

"What *are* you running on about?" my mad friend inquired. Green eyes flared suddenly on the roadway and he braked just in time to miss a cow.

"Let me put it this way: If you dumped a weather station on an unknown planet and got a normal reading for several days, then a sudden drop to 60° below for six months, then in a matter of minutes the temperature climbed into a range that melted your transmitter, wouldn't you decide that planet wasn't worth invading?"

My mad friend placed a stiff forefinger to one nostril and inhaled noisily through the other. But he was very quiet all the way home.



*The visiting card of this story's author reads: "Holley Cantine—Writer...Agitator...Editor...Publisher...Printer...Carpenter & Builder...Brewer...Trombone & Tuba (funerals a specialty)...rates on requests." There is something authoritatively diffuse about all that—it makes us wonder a bit uneasily on just how large the kernel of truth in the following tale may be.*

## **Double, Double, Toil and Trouble**

**by Holley Cantine**

THE ESSENTIAL NATURE OF MY mind is more than ordinarily rational and scientific, but there has always been a wild strain in it—magic fascinated me from early childhood. I couldn't entirely bring myself to believe in it, but there were times when I could suspend my disbelief until I could almost feel the thrill of upsetting the laws of nature, and had there been a reputable sorcerer available during such moments, I might very well have asked to be taken on as an apprentice. For the most part, however, I laughed at such fancies, and applied myself earnestly to the study of science.

I never did get properly launched on a scientific career, but this had nothing to do with my curious penchant for witchcraft. During my student days, I became so deeply involved in radical activity that I presently aban-

doned all thought of seeking a berth in a university or research foundation—either of which would necessarily be subsidized and therefore, to my mind, controlled, by a status quo I had come to despise. Without waiting to graduate, I plunged myself completely into that complex world of intrigue and sectarian strife that passed for revolutionary politics in New York during the thirties and forties.

For some years, I lived for the cause, working sporadically at poorly paid, part-time jobs to keep myself in food and a cheap furnished room, so I could spend most of my time at the exciting game of plotting and counterplotting, drawing up manifestoes, polemics and learned Marxist dissertations, and holding endless discussions with my comrades. It all seemed terribly important and

significant. We believed that the Revolution was imminent, and that our miniscule, ill-trained and badly informed groups—or one of them, at any rate—would shortly be wielding power over vast masses of people. It wasn't a bad life, in many ways—it was certainly stimulating, and enormously gratifying to the ego, as long as one could continue to believe that we were the true elect—but there came a time when it began to pall on me.

To be perfectly honest, I suppose what woke me up was the arrival of a small legacy—not really very much money, but more than I had ever possessed at one time before. I knew that if I remained in the movement, it would soon be dissipated on printer's bills and rent for meeting halls, and I would be back where I was before it came. I was selfish enough to resent this, and for the first time began to take serious stock of myself.

The group to which I then belonged—it was called the Ultra-Revolutionary Left Socialist Workers' council, or something equally grandiose and pretentious—had been reduced by internal dissension to about 14 members, and there were rumors of an impending faction fight which might well split it still further. My comrades were all either narrow fanatics or callow youths, and their intemperance and wordiness in-

creasingly had been getting on my nerves. Furthermore, the status quo seemed as solidly entrenched as ever. All in all, it seemed like an excellent time to pull out, and retire to the country to think things through. I knew I could never achieve any sort of mental balance as long as I remained in the hectic, frenetic atmosphere of the movement. At least, these were my rationalizations—I guess I'm still enough of a Marxist to believe that the money was the real reason for my defection.

I bought a few acres of unimproved land on the side of a mountain, a hundred miles from the city, and at least two from the nearest neighbor; a second hand jeep, which was the only kind of car that could negotiate the rough wagon trail that led to my property, and enough building material and equipment for a small cabin. The cabin was pretty crude—I hadn't much skill at that sort of work, but I learned a lot as I went along, and it kept out the weather, after a fashion.

By the time I had the cabin ready to live in, my money was all gone, but I was able to pick up enough odd jobs in the neighborhood to satisfy my simple needs, and still have plenty of free time. I found that by leaving the city, I had shed the radical movement like a bad dream. While I still believed vaguely in the desirability of socialism, once I had the chance

to achieve some perspective, it became perfectly obvious that the wrangling little sects that had consumed so large a part of my life would never amount to anything, and I was well quit of them.

To fill the void in my life left by the cessation of political activity, I began to revive my old interest in magic. I had acquired, over the years, a fair collection of books on magical lore—like all radicals I was an inveterate browser in second-hand bookstores—which I had not previously found time to look into seriously.

My only other hobby was early New Orleans Jazz, an interest I had shared with several of my younger comrades in the city. I had a number of worn, but still playable phonograph records—chiefly marching band music of the Bunk Johnson-George Lewis school—and with part of my legacy I had bought a beat-up old slide trombone. When I wasn't poring over my books on magic, I spent my free time listening to records and teaching myself to play the horn. I made very few acquaintances in the area—the extreme gregariousness of the movement had surfeited my desire for social life, and at the same time, its prevailing attitude of suspicion, according to which every stranger was a potential police spy, had so entered my system that I was very wary about letting anyone get to know me intimate-

ly. I imagine my reserve might have broken down had there been an amateur brass band somewhere around, for once I had mastered the rudiments of the trombone, I longed for an opportunity to play with others, but the local town band had been disbanded some forty years earlier, and no one but myself seemed at all interested in reviving it.

The lonely, hermit-like existence I was leading, so much resembling that of a medieval alchemist, made it easier for me to take magic seriously, or perhaps the accumulated frustrations of my thwarted scientific and revolutionary careers had reduced my mind to an approximation of the prelogical stage. In any case, I found myself more and more receptive to the spells and incantations in my books, and soon began to try some of them, still half-believingly, but with scrupulous attention to the details of the formulae. At first, I had no more success than I had expected, but it amused me to continue, and I became obsessed with the idea that if only I could get everything exactly right for once, it might really work.

Magic is a tricky subject: there are so many factors involved that are next to impossible to control—so much depends on chance. One can never be sure of finding the right quantity and quality of a certain herb or root when the moon is

exactly at the right phase and angle, and many of the ingredients were so loosely described that I could go by guesswork only. A lot depends on mood, too, and I could seldom count on keeping myself in the proper frame of mind long enough to complete all the preparations. I suspect that this has always been true, and that is why so few really potent spells have been cast through the ages, and why magic has fallen into such disrepute.

However, I did eventually succeed, if only once. At some point in my investigations, I worked the formula for doubling correctly, and while I was never able to get any other formula to go right, it convinced me that with sufficient perseverance, I could accomplish almost anything. However, something kept me from persevering. I think I was chiefly frightened at the realization that I was dealing with something entirely serious, instead of idly amusing myself with a rather eccentric hobby. There was no telling where it might lead me. As it was, the one gift I had acquired was enough to change my whole life, and I don't know how many others. But I'm getting ahead of my story.

My way of life did not change much immediately. After so many years of scepticism, it was difficult for me to assimilate my new acquisition, and I used it sparingly.

I continued to go out to work, but less frequently, since by doubling my provisions—at least those that didn't spoil: canned goods, bottled beer, salt fish and flour, which constituted the bulk of my diet—I could make them last indefinitely. For a comparatively small initial outlay, I could have lived on champagne, caviar and truffles, but I preferred beer and beans.

I avoided the doubling of money. I figured that a large number of bills with identical serial numbers would inevitably give rise to suspicions of counterfeiting, and if I paid all my bills with coins, that would look peculiar too. Occasionally, when I felt too lazy to go out and look for work, and was down to my last fifty cents—I kept a half dollar in permanent reserve—I'd double it a few times as a delaying action, but never enough to be conspicuous. I didn't want to make trouble for myself with the locals. Anyhow, a few hours of work every week sufficed to provide all the cash I needed, and that was no hardship for me.

As a matter of fact, once I stopped my magical researches, I had more time than I knew what to do with. Two hours of daily practice on the horn was about all I could sustain, without any outside stimulation, and there wasn't much of anything else I could find to occupy me. I considered resuming my interrupted scientific

studies, but so many years had elapsed since I left the university that I dreaded to find out how much I had forgotten. Besides, I felt uncomfortable about going back to science after having trafficked in the black arts, rather as a whore must feel at the prospect of associating with respectable married women. I could probably have carried it off all right, but I couldn't help feeling a curious mixture of scorn for the innocence of my potential colleagues, and shame for having violated their code. I did quite a lot of desultory reading, to help pass the time, but I had never had much interest in literature, and it soon palled.

Then one night I woke up after dreaming of being a member of a band—a perennial wish-fulfillment dream of mine—and it suddenly dawned on me that I could employ my gift to satisfy that desire. I got right out of bed—I knew if I waited for morning, I'd probably lack the nerve to try it; I was scared enough half asleep—and doubled myself. I hadn't tried to double anything more complicated than a salt herring until then, and while I had never failed at anything I had attempted, I had no way of knowing if I'd come out of the experience alive. I was just desperate enough to take the chance, though, and the result was, or seemed to be, perfect. The two of us looked at

each other, laughed sort of hysterically, then we shook hands, and both of us doubled and redoubled. We all decided that eight was plenty for a start, and set about doubling enough food and drink to feed us. We had a feast, with plenty of beer, after which we doubled the mattress and bedclothes into enough for all—they pretty nearly filled the cabin—and tried to get back to sleep. But we were too excited and overstimulated; we kept giggling and skylarking like a bunch of schoolboys in a dormitory when the proctor is away.

Next day, we started right away to provide ourselves with adequate living quarters. Eight semi-skilled men can accomplish a lot more than eight times as much as one green hand, and to our surprise, by quitting time we had a site cleared of brush and largely leveled.

After we had knocked off work, one of us drove the jeep over to the workshop of a young Italian, who lived not far away, and who earned his living by providing and servicing band instruments for a number of high schools within a twenty-five mile radius. Instruments that the schools had discarded—and public schools have gotten very particular about such things—he sold to the general public at very moderate prices. I had had occasion to take my trombone to him for repairs a couple

of times, and found him both sympathetic to impoverished amateur musicians, and a conscientious craftsman. He loved his work—he had learned the trade as a boy, most of his family being involved with musical instruments in some capacity—but the rough treatment the instruments received from the school children caused him endless pain, however good it was for his business.

Our man picked out a fairly new clarinet, made a down payment—I had been working fairly regularly and had accumulated a small cash reserve—and brought it back to our cabin. It was doubled, and about a week later—we didn't want to give the instrument dealer an impression of hopeless frivolity—the original was returned and traded in on a coronet.

Meanwhile, our new building was progressing rapidly. In a few days we finished leveling the site, dug it out to a depth of about two feet, and filled the hole with broken stone, this operation being vastly simplified by doubling. Then one of us went to the local lumber yard, and bought one each of all the materials we needed; a small bag of cement, a two by six, a two by four, a few different kinds of board, roofing, insulation, nails, a window and so forth. I don't know what the lumber dealer made of the order, but he certainly couldn't have suspected we

were going to build a house with it, so there was no danger of gossip from that source revealing our plans.

We all felt that complete secrecy was vital. Now that we had each other, we had no further need of even the small amount of social life I had maintained, and we didn't want outsiders coming around and perhaps asking awkward questions. For all we knew, magic was still illegal: they used to burn and hang witches in the old days, and laws have a way of staying on the books long after they cease to be enforced. We all looked exactly alike, but as long as we took care to go out singly, no one could tell that there were more than one of us.

We mixed a bucket of cement, poured it into the hole we had dug, and by rapid doubling filled the hole with a solid block of concrete. When it was hard, we built the wall frames on it, and raised them as units—like an old-fashioned barn-raising. We only had to cut one master rafter to double from, but even so, inexperienced as we were, putting up the roof was a big job.

Once the rafters were set, the rest of the work on the building went quickly. It was a large barn-like structure, with a high ceiling, and good acoustics. There were plenty of double windows, and a big wood stove, the kind they used to have in the Elevated Sta-

tions, which we picked up cheap in a junk shop. For illumination, we had a whole lot of big hanging kerosene lamps and a few small ones; we were too far from the power line to make electrification feasible, and anyhow, we didn't see how we could double electricity.

Inside, we left the walls unfinished, and put up no partitions. There was a wide shelf at one end, where we set all our mattresses side by side; a big table built out of heavy lumber, with benches on either side of it, sat in the middle of the room, and a sort of bar was placed near it, against the wall. On the bar was a three burner alcohol stove—on which pots of soup, beans, and coffee were constantly simmering—a number of platters loaded with cold cuts, cheese, pickles, sauerkraut, and sliced bread, and a tub of bottled beer—imported German beer: since we had to buy only one bottle, we felt we might as well have the best—and a box of good cigars. At the other end of the room from the bed shelf, we arranged eight chairs in a semi-circle, for our band practice.

We had returned the original of the cornet and traded it in on a baritone horn, but our building was so nearly finished that we decided against using any more trickery on the instrument dealer—we had been feeling pretty shabby about it anyhow, he was

such a nice guy—and pay cash for whatever other instruments we wanted. We had used up all our cash reserve, what with down payments at the instrument store, buying building materials and food, but we had a fine oak tree on our property, tall, straight, and free of branches for at least thirty feet. We felled it, cut it into saw logs, snaked them out to the road with the jeep, and there doubled them into a substantial pile, which we sold to a sawmill for considerably more than all the instruments we wanted would cost—the mark-down of second-hand band instruments being approximately as large as that on cars. The sawmill man had his own woodlot, and didn't like to lay out money for other people's logs, but when he found we were willing to take an absurdly low price, he bought readily enough. We weren't commercially minded—had we been, we could have easily made a fortune in almost any manufacturing or merchandising business—and the price we asked was more than adequate compensation for the relatively trifling amount of actual labor we had done. Unfortunately, in our enthusiasm we unthinkingly let him take every last log in the pile, thus preventing us from doubling any more lumber out of it to meet future contingencies. Timber was our only natural resource, and apart from that one tree, all we had was



second-growth stuff, useful only for firewood.

We wanted the same instrumentation as the traditional New Orleans marching bands, lacking only the second cornet—all of us were determined to play different instruments: it was our only claim to individuality. We already had the trombone, cornet, clarinet and baritone horn, so we needed an alto, a tuba, and bass and snare drums. The alto cost only two dollars—the instrument dealer had an old one, that he said would require at least twenty dollars worth of his labor to take out the dents, and was willing to let us have it for what it had cost him, since used alto horns are slow sellers. We didn't mind the dents, and were well satisfied with the horn, which was otherwise in good working order. An E flat tuba was twenty dollars, and the two drums came to thirty, complete with sticks.

It took us a while to get the feel of playing together, but we enjoyed it right from the beginning. The cornet and clarinet, although they had gotten their instruments first, and had a slight headstart on the rest of us, had trouble mastering the unfamiliar instruments—the three saxhorns were enough like the trombone, for which we all had a pretty good embouchure, that we could play them fluently right away. The cornet got his lip into shape in a couple of weeks, and this gave the band a tremen-

dous lift. The clarinet took longer, that instrument being completely different from any of the brasses. He was able to provide an accompaniment of sorts in a month or so, but the solo from 'High Society' continued to elude him for the better part of a year. The two drummers had, in a way, the hardest time, since my sense of rhythm was the weakest side of my musical ability, but they persevered, and in time got pretty good, at least by our not very exacting standards.

I'm sure the ensemble would have sounded terrible to an expert, even at its best, but there is an exhilaration to playing in a group, even one composed entirely of dubs, and we were playing only for ourselves. Our tastes were identical, and our enthusiasm keen, so our technical shortcomings didn't bother us. Then, too, there was an unlimited supply of beer, and that helped keep us from being too critical.

By conventional standards, our life was impossibly disorderly. We ate and drank when we felt like it, slept when we had to, and spent the rest of the time playing, or loafing around, reading and talking. We didn't even bother to wash the dishes—we kept a master set in a cupboard, and doubled from it when we needed any. Dirty dishes were tossed on the dump, which gradually reached monumental proportions. We

solved the laundry problem the same way. Sometimes, when one of us came back from a trip to the dump, there would be talk of the advisability of working up the spell for making things vanish, but nothing came of it. We just couldn't be bothered.

It was, in most respects, a thoroughly satisfying life. The food was good, better than I'd ever had before. The soup and beans, from constant simmering, acquired a flavor that was unbeatable; the coffee, by the same token, was usually terrible—we were usually too lazy to start a fresh pot—but we didn't drink much coffee, and the beer was excellent. The only serious lack was sex. We kidded around about finding the most beautiful girl in the world and doubling her up for all of us, but we didn't really mean it. We were much too nervous about letting outsiders into our little world, and anyhow, we felt that the presence of women would probably take away more than it added. I had become accustomed to abstinence over the years, so I don't believe we suffered too intensely on that score. We had no particular ambition about our music. We periodically discussed the possibility of going on the road if we ever got good enough, but that seemed a long way off, and wasn't important. We were having enough fun playing for ourselves not to need an audience.

We had little occasion to go out. Each of us took a turn doing a day's work every week, to maintain our cash reserve for replenishing food that had gotten too stale to be worth doubling, and paying the land taxes and repair bills on the jeep. None of these expenses was heavy. The tax assessors had not been around since I had completed my original cabin, and the day they had come, in the early spring, the trail had been like a creek, and they gave me a very low assessment. The new building was sufficiently concealed by trees and brush to be invisible from the road, so they never knew it was there. By judicious doubling of spare parts, tires and fuel, we managed to keep the expense of operating the jeep down to a minimum. On various trips to local garages, we had succeeded in doubling ourselves a rather impressive collection of tools, when the garage men weren't looking, and a couple of us had become pretty good at using them. Occasionally we had to resort to expert help, when something major broke down, but we didn't use the jeep very much, and it had been in good condition when I bought it.

The necessity of going out to work at all got irksome after a while, but this problem was eventually solved for us by the cornet player. When his turn came around one time, instead of mak-

ing the rounds of prospective employers, as we ordinarily did, he drove to New York, where he pawned duplicates of his horn—which was by far the best instrument we owned—all along Third Avenue. He returned the next day, his pockets bulging with enough money to provide all our needs for several years, at the rate we were spending it. And when that was gone, we could always repeat the operation.

Just because I was able to work one spell successfully, I don't pretend to be an expert on magic, but I do know that the results one achieves are no more precise than those from any other form of reproduction. Whenever we doubled anything, the double seemed exactly the same as the original, although there were probably subtle differences we couldn't notice, even in the simplest objects. When it came to highly complicated organisms like ourselves, however, the differences were easily discernible.

In appearance, we were identical enough to fool anybody, but our personalities showed marked dissimilarities. The cornetist and the clarinetist were by far the most accomplished musicians—I believe they must have acquired the largest share of my magical streak, but they poured it into their horns, and kept the band jumping. I guess I got most of my early scientific temperament, and the bass

drummer clearly got the heaviest dose of whatever it was that kept me so long in the radical movement. He seemed almost like a throwback to my most ardent revolutionary phase.

For some time, these differences served to make our life together more interesting: our reactions were far from uniform, and this made our discussions livelier. But by degrees the bass drummer became more and more antagonistic to the rest of us. At first we thought that perhaps his instrument wasn't giving him enough scope, and several of us offered to spell him on the drum, and let him take a turn playing a horn, but this wasn't what he wanted at all. He had soured on our whole way of life, and this set up an unbearable tension.

He stopped playing with us, almost entirely, and one of the horn men had to take his place on the drum, while he sat around moodily, reading books on guerilla warfare, or went out and did target practice with an old .22 he'd picked up somewhere. When the rest of us weren't playing, he'd almost invariably start an argument about the folly of wasting our priceless gift. We tried kidding him along, pointing out that we weren't harming or exploiting anybody, and the world would probably make a mess of the gift if we offered it, but this merely enraged him. "You're just a bunch of

lousy renegades," he'd shout, "Bourgeois decadents. You could be out saving the world, and here you sit, fiddling while it burns." The only way we could shut him up was to take up our instruments and drown him out.

We were neither surprised nor disappointed when he left, early one morning, before anyone else was awake. We couldn't be entirely sure he was really gone, at first, since the jeep was still there. Then one of us recalled being awakened briefly by the sound of the jeep's motor starting, and we decided he must have doubled it—none of us had ever dared attempt anything so ambitious before, but presumably it had worked. We waited for a few days to make sure he wasn't coming back, then the snare drummer doubled himself, bringing the band back to full strength again. The new bass drummer was fine, and we were all relieved to be rid of the old one, who had turned out to be such a drag.

He never wrote, but we picked up a few hints about his activities. One day, our tuba player was idly glancing through a New York newspaper at the store—we didn't read the papers with any regularity, but from time to time one of us would feel an urge to catch up on the news—and found an item about someone being arrested for soap-boxing without a permit and giving away samples of merchan-

dise without a peddler's license.

It could be only our ex-drummer: who else would combine those activities? He must have been distributing a foretaste of the abundance to come. It surprised us all that he could be naive enough to believe the police would let him get away with it. Of course, he hadn't given his right name, but the name mentioned in the item was one that I had once used as a pseudonym in my politically active days.

The item didn't mention what kind of a sentence he had received, and although we looked in the papers for the next few days, we couldn't find any further mention of the incident. But a month or so later, a local gun-dealer, with whom I had been fairly intimate for a time when I first came to live in the country, ran into our clarinetist in town and upbraided him with mock indignation.

"What are you, a buyer or a creamer?" he had shouted. "You rush into the shop, demand that I bring out all my rare goodies, and the minute I turn my back, you're gone like a turkey in the corn."

Translated from our friend's jargon, this meant that our drummer, having presumably served his time, had come back, doubled himself a supply of weapons when the dealer was out of the room, and left with them for an unknown destination. We didn't at all like the implications of that,

but did our best to put it out of our minds.

After that we stopped looking at the papers, and almost entirely stopped going out. I guess we were all afraid of what might be happening, and concentrated on our music with what was close to desperation, avoiding any mention of the probable whereabouts and activities of our former colleague.

Then one day, when we were taking a break between sessions, and were scattered around the room, eating, drinking, tuning our instruments or just resting, we heard the sound of a jeep coming up the trail. The cornet man peeked out of a window cautiously—we were more apprehensive than ever about visitors—and the rest of us gathered in a worried crowd behind him, taking care to keep out of sight.

The sound of the motor came closer, and our lookout shouted: "Hey, dig this. Big Skin has doubled himself some playmates, and they're coming on like gangbusters."

We all rushed to the windows and watched the jeep drive up to the house and stop. It wasn't the double of our battered civilian jeep—it was a fairly new looking army model—but the four men in it were unmistakably the ex-drummer's doubles. They were dressed in semi-military fashion, with steel helmets of some foreign

type, and were heavily armed. Their faces, though familiar enough in their general outlines, were considerably altered, when we got a closer look. They seemed misshapen, coarser, somehow; their mouths were tight and cruel, and their eyes had an expression of almost animal malignancy.

As they got out of their jeep and advanced towards the house, all the others piled out the door to greet them, with, I thought, rather forced joviality. I hung back a little; I didn't at all like their looks, and doubted their mission was friendly.

Sure enough, as soon as the seventh man was outside the house, the four of them opened fire with some kind of machine pistol. At that range they couldn't miss, but they continued to pour bullets into the bodies for a long time. I cowered in a corner, expecting that they would presently hunt me out and shoot me too. Instead, they intoned, in a strange, harsh voice—in unison, to help me—"Thus perish traitors to the revolution," turned on their heels and marched back to the jeep, which left immediately.

It was then that it occurred to me that they had no way of knowing about the substitute bass drummer, and must have believed they had finished us all.

I spent the next couple of days in a state of shock, digging a mass

grave and burying the rest of the band without ceremony. Then I packed a small bundle of provisions, and left. I was perhaps foolish to leave the one place where I was reasonably safe from reprisals, but I couldn't stand it there any more, and the thought that I could double myself another band and start all over again positively sickened me. I left everything as it was—even abandoning the jeep. I don't think I had any special motive. I was still pretty dazed.

The first few miles of my hike, everything looked about the same as it always had, but once I reached the center of the village, I realized that the violence against us had not been an isolated phenomenon. Most of the houses were scarred by gunfire, several had been burned to the ground, and there were no people around at all.

I continued through the devastated countryside, passing, to my utter astonishment, wrecked army vehicles of various kinds, and numerous corpses, both military and civilian. A good many looked as though they might have been my doubles, and were dressed roughly the same as the four who had visited us, but the majority seemed to be either regular army men or local residents. Obviously a running battle of some proportions had been fought over this terrain, and it seemed incredible that we hadn't been aware of it. However,

our house was isolated, and most of the time we were making so much noise ourselves that we wouldn't be likely to hear anything else.

After some days of aimless wandering, I finally encountered a small group of ragged survivors. But they took one look at me, screamed, "There's another one," and ran off in terror. Since the next people I met might well be armed, I decided I had better lie low for a while, and holed up in an abandoned house. In the cellar I found a pile of newspapers for the past few months, and to pass the time, began to read through them. They told me all I needed to know about the situation, and confirmed my worst fears. Inasmuch as I am probably the only person in a position to read between the lines, and explain what really happened, I am writing all this down, and plan to double it into millions of copies. It may be too late to save the country, but if not, surely an accurate understanding of the nature of the enemy ought to be more useful than the wild conjectures and speculations I find in the press.

I won't bother to reproduce the newspaper's version of events, since anyone who gets to see this will undoubtedly be already familiar with it, but here, as nearly as I can work it out, is a rough account of my double's actions to date.

After his visit to the gun-shop, he appears to have driven to Washington—the dates check to the best of my recollection. Once there, he must have doubled himself a few times, and made his way, armed with pistols, into the visitor's galleries of the House of Representatives and the Senate. There he did a lot of rapid doubling, and proceeded to clear out both chambers. I guess he sustained heavy casualties from the Secret Service men, but continued to double reinforcements until he was master of the Capitol. He must have been quite an army by the time he moved on the White House and took possession. To judge from the text of the manifesto he issued at this time—"The Bourgeois Government is No More: The New Regime of Freedom and Plenty is Now Beginning"—I would surmise that his mind had already begun to deteriorate as the result of excessive doubling.

During the next week or so, he was occupied pacifying the city of Washington, and trying to establish an emergency distribution system. This was his most benevolent phase; I believe he was completely in good faith when he offered free food and clothing to anyone who came to his distribution centers—it wouldn't have been any trick at all for him to produce unlimited quantities of merchandise. However, the population of the city didn't know that, and it is hardly

surprising that they suspected a trap, and left the city rather than take a chance on his generosity. This, I am sure, so infuriated him, that his already weakened mind broke down altogether.

Those congressmen who had escaped the massacre in the Capitol, together with those who had been absent that day, set up a provisional government in Virginia, and launched the army against the usurper—they apparently thought he was an invasion from Russia. I hope they didn't retaliate on the Russians with atomic weapons as the newspaper suggests they intended to do. This counter-revolutionary attack, as he calls it in his second manifesto, caught him in a grim mood; he doubled himself into a vast horde, which seems to call itself the People's Volunteers for National Liberation, and fought back furiously.

To judge by the newspaper reports on the early battles in the campaign, he must have depended entirely on force of numbers to overrun the regular army's position, and his losses were enormous. Subsequently, having captured, and undoubtedly doubled, heavier weapons, he began to fight more conservatively, but the prodigious amount of doubling that went on during the first few weeks of fighting had presumably reduced his forces to the brutal automatons that wiped out my comrades, and seem to be advancing

steadily along the Eastern Seaboard. I don't know where they are now, the last paper in my collection being several days old.

This is an army that puts the ancient Mongols to shame. Not only is it able to do without any service of supply; since each man can carry all his own provisions and ammunition, doubling more as needed, but the supply of troops is inexhaustible, as long as just one of them remains alive, and they fight with a blind, savage fanati-

cism which has long since lost every trace of the idealism with which he started.

After reading some of the reports of wanton massacre, I have been strongly tempted to double myself into an army, and go out to try to destroy these monsters, but am deterred by one consideration. What is to prevent me from degenerating into their likeness, if I follow their example? Were not these fiends—and not so very long ago—myself?

### ***Through Time And Space With Ferdinand Feghoot: XXII***

Ferdinand Feghoot produced the greatest horror movies of all time in the late 1970's. He discovered the dreadful Karkas Gabor working as an obscure undertaker's assistant in Budapest; and his werewolves, vampires, zombies, bakemono, and things that went bump in the night were so real that he was threatened with several exorcisms and a Congressional Investigation. Then Karkas Gabor was murdered.

The suspects were obvious: Basil Dripp-Grue, with his extra-long eyeteeth and his corpse-like mistress, Evila de Kay; old, hairy-palmed Lou Garou; petite Liz Bathory, who seemed to have come out of nowhere, and her boy friend, the gibbering Orson J. Papaloi; and a great many creepy-crawlies who starred in the worst sort of B pictures. All were fiendishly jealous of Gabor.

The police questioned one and another, and got nowhere. Then Dripp-Grue and Evila gave Feghoot the one clue he needed. They invited everyone in the vampire-werewolf set to a banquet and served up poor Gabor, whom they had murdered and cremated, disguised in a stew. At once, Feghoot had them arrested.

"It was simple," he told the admiring audience. "If you had my experience with Transylvanian cuisine, you too would be able to recognize Hungarian ghoulish ash."

—GRENDAL BRIARTON (*with thanks to Laurence Gurney*)



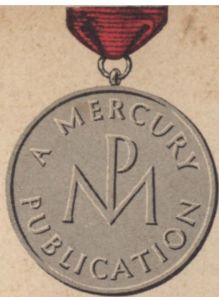
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